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ABSTRACT

Although America has committed itself to building a rigorous public educational system, student achievement gaps and low-performing schools continue to exist. Schools with high proportions of students of color and students from poverty are less likely to offer a challenging curriculum. State systems of standards and accountability have often been designed to effectively find low-performing schools rather than effectively improve them. This report examines the character of these systemwide factors of failure in public schools. The first chapter describes the context of the dysfunction and, thus, sets the stage for improvement strategies. Chapter 2 discusses the characteristics of teaching, leadership, and other school characteristics that schools need to improve. Chapter 3 considers key elements of the state information and policy environment critical to finding low-performing schools, diagnosing the causes of low achievement, and to intervening effectively. Chapter 4 discusses ways in which community resources can play a role in helping schools achieve. Chapter 5 discusses the role of money in school improvement. Appendices contain the provisions from the No Child Left Behind Act related to low-performing schools, case studies of improved low-performing schools, Kentucky's standards and indicators for school improvement, and selected diagnostic indicators for school improvement. (Contains 102 references.) (RT)

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National Association of State Boards of Education

2002

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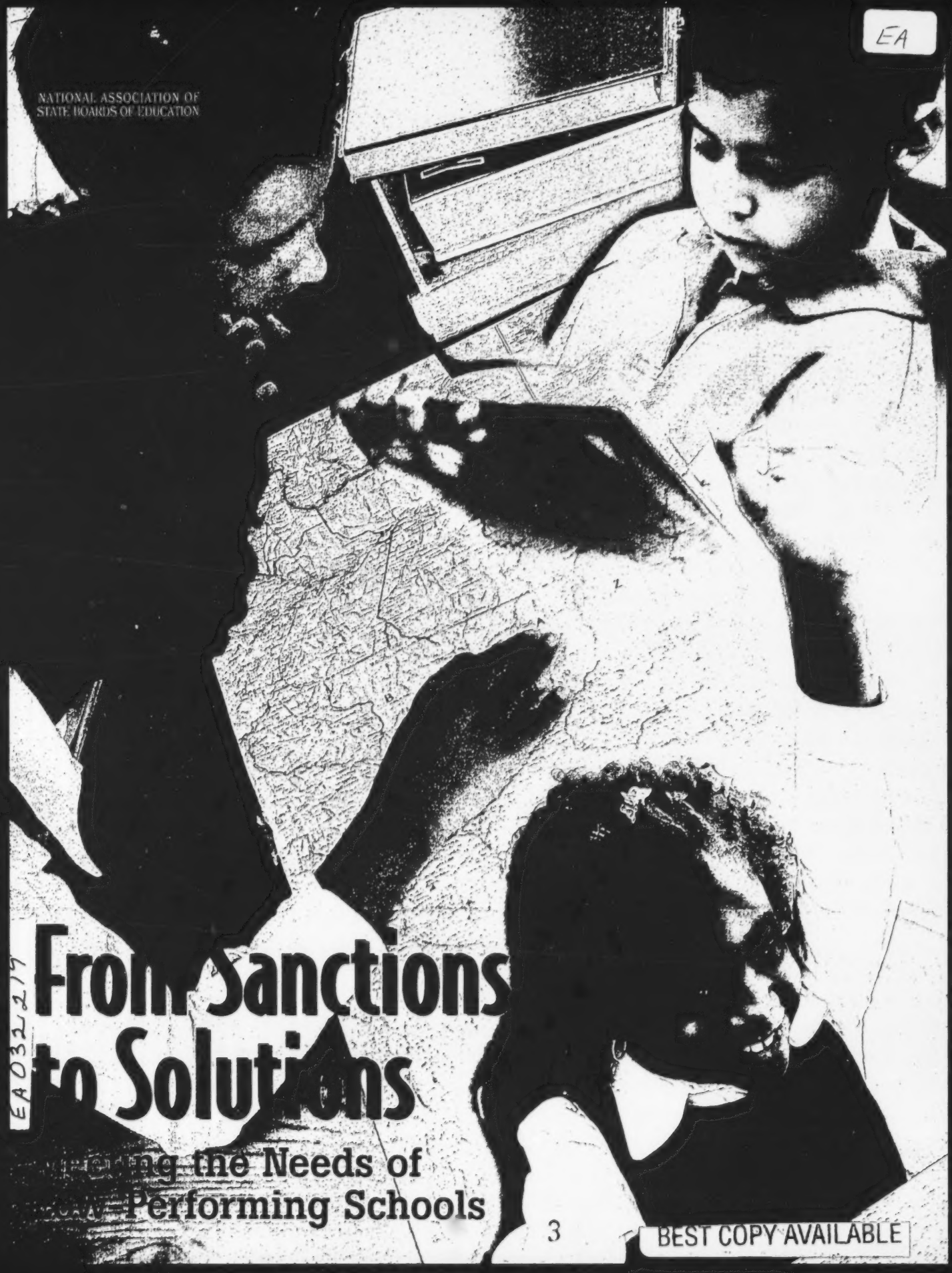

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From SANCTIONS to SOLUTIONS

Meeting the Needs of Low-Performing Schools

The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Low-Performing Schools From Sanctions to Solutions

The NASBE Study Group on Low-Performing Schools From Sanctions to Solutions

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Chapter 1

Low-Performing Schools: Moving from Accountability to Improvement

Introduction

Our country has committed itself to building a rigorous public education system that allows no child to fall between the cracks, and for the first time in history, state policymakers have clearly articulated the "world-class" standards they expect students, schools, and districts to achieve. Even as these standards take hold, however, and as students, schools, and districts are evaluated by state assessment systems that are tied to the new standards, it is clear that millions of students, thousands of schools, and many districts are not meeting the standards that state and federal policymakers hope for them to achieve.[1]

From a policymaking perspective, what is more striking and troubling than the sheer number of students, schools, and districts that fail to achieve high standards is the extent to which this achievement gap tracks roughly along socioeconomic and racial lines. For example, more than half of all low-performing schools are in high-poverty, urban areas.[2] A disproportionate number of low-performing schools also exist in rural areas, where child poverty is even greater than in urban areas.[3] About three-quarters of low-performing schools have student bodies in which most students qualify for the federal free-lunch program, and two-fifths of low-performing schools have minority enrollments of more than 90 percent.[4]

In the past, some policymakers have come to the conclusion that schools could do little to impact chronic low achievement because of the strong influence of culture and poverty on achievement. To some, these notions were cemented by a body of research that concluded that a child's family and peer influences, rather than school resources and experiences, are the best predictors of student success in school.[5] Another body of research, however, presents a mountain of evidence to suggest that, while poverty and culture are not irrelevant to student achievement, schools do matter in significant and important ways. According to Kati Haycock, director of the Education Trust, "It's not that issues like poverty and parental education don't matter. Clearly they do. But we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference."[6]

The National Association of State Boards of Education charged the Study Group on Low-Performing Schools with examining the current status of low-performing schools across the country and with outlining how state policies can target financial, human, and programmatic resources

to turn low-performing schools around. In examining these and other issues, the Study Group arrived at four powerful points of consensus:

- *No school fails because its students cannot succeed.* Given appropriate support and an environment that is infused with expectations of academic excellence, students at risk of failure can and do succeed everyday.

- State and federal commitments to "leave no child behind" mean that arguments about whether or not achievement gaps can be closed are moot because *achievement gaps among groups of students are no longer an option.* States can no longer ask *if* all schools can achieve high standards; the only appropriate question in light of their pledge to leave no child behind is *how* to make it so.

- Ensuring that all schools are effective at enabling all their students to achieve high standards requires states to reject the current state of affairs in which *children with great needs—often those in poverty, of color, or with disabilities—are attending some of the nation's lowest-performing schools and are consistently denied powerful academic resources that foster achievement.*

- Finally, and in the Study Group's opinion, most importantly, school accountability systems that focus on measuring achievement and distributing sanctions and rewards on the basis of student achievement are missing a fundamentally critical point. The goal of standards and accountability systems should not be to distribute rewards and sanctions based on achievement. Rather, the central goal of *all* education policies and programs needs to be school improvement for greater student achievement. *Standards and accountability systems need to be re-conceptualized as comprehensive school improvement systems,* and every element of the system should be measured in terms of its impact on student learning.

These four points of consensus made clear to the Study Group the extent to which low-performing schools continue to exist because of system-wide factors that call into question the ability of every student to achieve and then deny those students, and the schools and districts that serve them, the very resources and targeted assistance they need to achieve high standards. The following section describes ways in which the design of education systems may inadvertently impede, rather than encourage, comprehensive school improvement for all schools.

Systematic Barriers to High Achievement in Every School

Although states have framed their accountability systems with the intent of holding all practitioners and policymakers accountable for educating all students to meet high standards, most systems of standards and accountability have not been particularly effective at achieving this goal. Fundamentally, this is because many accountability systems are designed more to sort and label schools and distribute rewards and sanctions based upon categories of achievement than they are to deliberately direct school improvement. The Study Group has found at least four critical factors that contribute to the persistence of low achievement:

Inequitable distribution of academic and other resources stymies capacity building in schools. In schools where the need for improvement is greatest, resources to support school improvement, such as high-quality staff, high-quality buildings, and high-quality instructional materials, are often scarce. For example, in Oakland, California, some low-performing schools are operating at two and three times their intended student capacity, which means that important academic resources like libraries, computer labs, and gymnasiums are turned into classroom space. Following are a selection of other important ways in which resources are distributed inequitably to schools:

- *Schools with high proportions of students of color and students from poverty are less likely to offer a challenging curriculum.* The Education Trust has been "stunned by how little is expected of students in high-poverty schools—how few assignments they get in a given school week or month. Stunned, second, by the low level of the few assignments that they do get. In high-poverty urban middle schools, for example, we see a lot of coloring assignments, rather than writing or mathematics assignments. Even at the high school level, we found coloring assignments. 'Read *To Kill a Mockingbird*,' says the eleventh-grade English teacher, 'and

Defining Low-Performing Schools

Currently, state definitions of low-performing schools vary considerably. Some states use absolute scores on state assessments to decide which schools are low performing, while others use value-added measures that hold schools accountable for increases in student scores that occur as a result of attending the particular school. Other states choose a number of schools and decide that the lowest-performing schools in the state, up to that number, will be designated as low performing.

However a state decides to define low performance, the Study Group believes that fair measures of school performance should always include multiple measures. One test score is incapable of reflecting the quality of a school. For example, a middle school may hold test scores steady while significantly reducing its dropout rate - a critically important improvement in educational outcomes that is not reflected in test scores.

Federal law now requires that states measure high school performance according to two indicators: test scores and dropout rates. For elementary schools, states need to measure performance according to test scores and one other variable of their choice. This requirement to include more than test scores in measures of school performance is an important step forward in building a more comprehensive picture of school performance. The Study Group consensus, however, is that **the definition of low-performing schools requires further refinement to encompass multi-tiered measures across classroom, school, district, and state levels that include several additional variables relating to school quality.** In terms of test score data, this may mean eventually moving beyond the current federal "status" model that establishes one benchmark that all schools must reach by a specific date and toward measures of *relative gain*, where each school is accountable for a certain amount of improvement according to its baseline performance measure; measures of the *achievement gap* that examine both increases in the percentage of students testing at the proficient level as well as decreases in the percentage of students scoring at the lowest achievement levels; and *value-added* measures that measure the particular contribution a school makes to student performance by taking account of student-level characteristics, such as prior achievement levels.

when you're finished, color a poster about it.' One principal highlighted in the Heritage Foundation's 'No Excuses' study found upon arriving at her south Chicago elementary school that, 'there was no reading program in kindergarten and no significant writing anywhere in the curriculum, and most of the learning was of a mundane skill-based sort that could never lead to the advanced curriculum in math and science that the [school] council had envisioned.'"[7]

- *Minority students and students in poor urban and rural areas have poorly qualified teachers.* For example, a study in Tennessee found that African American students are almost two times more likely to be taught by ineffective teachers than white students.[8] In Texas, as the percentage of white students increases in a school, so does the average teacher's score on the state teacher licensure exam. When comparing poor white students to poor African American students, white students were still more likely to have well-qualified teachers.[9] Another study undertaken in the state of New York examined the teacher workforce over fifteen years and concluded that the quality of teachers in large urban areas is "much worse ... in comparison to other regions."[10]

- *Minority students and students in poor urban and rural areas attend schools with fewer support personnel.* One case in Philadelphia illustrates this point: A principal who moved from an inner-city school in Philadelphia with an 85 percent poverty rate to a comparatively sized school in suburban Philadelphia with a 9 percent poverty rate found that she also moved from one assistant principal to three, from three secretaries to fourteen, from no instructional aides to over ten, from two counselors to six counselors and one psychologist, and from one part-time nurse to two full-time nurses and a nurses' aide. Ironically, the principal's salary was $20,000 more working in the suburban school than in the urban one.[11]

- *High-poverty school districts have fewer financial resources.* Despite over thirty years of equity-based lawsuits over school funding, students in high-poverty schools continue to receive fewer dollars when adjusted for student needs. According to national averages adjusted to reflect regional cost differences and differences in student needs, high-poverty districts have $1,139 less per student than low-poverty districts.[12] Students of color, new immigrant students, students living in poverty, and English language learners are substantially more likely to attend the schools and districts with fewer resources. Many states across the country have faced litigation because of the unequal provision of financial resources to schools, and a number of these states are under court order to develop school finance formulas that distribute more funds to schools that need them most.

In other words, some of our least-qualified teachers are using inferior curricular materials in under-resourced schools to educate some of the nation's most vulnerable children. A comprehensive system of school improvement seeks out schools that are operating with less than their fair share of academic resources and immediately builds capacity to support high-quality teaching and learning.

Schools must contend with conflicting policy agendas that ask schools both to sort students according to ability and to develop high achievement among all students. One of our nation's greatest sources of pride and national identity is our belief in rewarding individuals socially, educationally, and economically for hard work and achievement. This belief has given rise to the "anyone can become President if they work hard enough" ideal and created a national sentiment that applauds stories of sharecroppers who become senators and new immigrants who become corporate leaders. Public schools have played a critical role in our unique belief that success should result from merit, as they have distributed to citizens from all walks of life the basic tools for participation in a capitalist democracy.

But as much as American public schools foster opportunity, they can also impede it in powerful ways. For

centuries, students have been sorted into groups based upon perceptions of their potential, and students ranked near the bottom have often been denied access to the kind of high-quality education that other students have taken for granted.[13] For example, assessment programs designed to sort students onto "bell curves" and label students as above and below the "average" have fed into deeply rooted assumptions about the appropriateness of sorting students into different achievement levels that proscribe, to a large extent, a person's life chances in economic, social, and intellectual terms. Also, for decades students

were tracked into "high" or "low" level classes, and students in "low" classes had little chance of attending college or entering a professional career. In fact, until about twenty years ago, many educators assumed that achievement inequities among students were intractable and that a core of students would always, by definition, be left behind.

The "standards movement" of the last twenty years has been an unprecedented and extraordinary movement away from the "sorting" purpose of schools toward the recognition that schools, districts, and state departments of education, along with students and families, are responsible for developing high levels of knowledge and skills in *all* students. But most education systems continue to contain vestigial sorting mechanisms that work at

cross-purposes with state efforts to fully develop the intellectual capacity of all students and bring every student to high standards. For example, students who fail to achieve high standards in the early years of school often continue to be sorted into slower-paced remedial classes that compound their low achievement over time rather than into accelerated classes that focus on intellectual development with rigorous instruction and an engaging curriculum.

A comprehensive system of school improvement eradicates mechanisms that sort students in ways that reinforce achievement gaps and builds systems to accelerate and enrich the learning experiences of students at risk of school failure.

State systems of standards and accountability have often been designed to effectively find *low-performing schools rather than to effectively* improve *them.* The third reason why low-performing schools persist is because most existing state systems of standards and accountability provide scant help in remediating the inequitable distribution of academic opportunity. Generally, systems of standards and accountability are designed to answer the primary question, "Who is failing to meet standards?" but not the critically important and more complex question, "Why?" Busy collecting information about education outcomes, primarily in the form of assessment results, many states find that they have little insight into the specific teaching and learning and organizational processes that exist in chronically failing schools. Accountability systems that have not been designed to inform diagnosis and intervention leave schools and districts that want to understand low achievement with *too little information too late.* Without a clear understanding of *why* schools fail, many schools, districts, and states find that they are unable to intervene effectively in the school improvement process.

In some cases, even finding and labeling schools as low performing compounds the difficulties in school improvement by creating a culture of pessimism that makes far-reaching reform difficult. Building a system that focuses on informing and supporting positive school change can transform the culture of school improvement from punitive to developmental.

Finding low-performing schools is a beginning, not an end. Systems of comprehensive school improvement include proven methods to boost achievement in all schools.

State intervention, technical assistance, and program and policy development are not approached systematically. Once a school or district is designated as low performing, different state accountability systems prescribe several kinds of interventions that may impact low-performing schools in a range of ways. A few states respond to low performance with sanctions, such as administrative takeovers or reconstitution, private management, or revocation of accreditation. Most states and many districts require low-performing schools and districts to develop and implement a school improvement plan and to make special professional development and technical assistance opportunities available to teachers and administrators at low-performing schools. Some states require low-performing schools to adopt comprehensive school reform programs (see box on page 10). A few states have developed "early warning" systems to flag marginal schools and to begin interventions before a school becomes low performing. Other states and districts offer students the option to transfer to another school, to attend summer school, or to receive supplemental education services. The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to implement several of these interventions in the coming years.

But the extent to which these interventions actually help low-performing schools improve depends in large part on at least two factors:

- The extent to which states, districts, and schools have detailed information about

How Many of Our Nation's Schools Are Low Performing?

In July 2002, the federal government identified 8,652 schools as low performing, based on state definitions. This number is expected to increase in future years as federal legislation that sets a national standard for adequate yearly progress on state assessments is implemented. Under the new legislation, any school that fails to make adequate yearly progress on state assessments over two testing cycles - or in which any disaggregated group of students fails to make adequate yearly progress over the same time period - is low performing. Adequate yearly progress is defined as the interval of progress necessary in order for all groups of students to reach 100 percent proficiency by 2012-13.

According to federal law, schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress, and the students who attend them, are entitled to certain kinds of assistance. In the first year a school is identified, students are able to attend another school in the same district that has not been designated low performing, and districts must pay transportation costs. In the second year of designation, districts must also purchase supplemental services for low-income students attending low-performing schools. In instances where low performance continues even after the implementation of school choice and supplemental services, other interventions such as changes in school governance and adoption of whole school reform models are required by federal law. The low-performing school, in return, may request technical assistance from the state. More information on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 is included in Appendix I.

The implications of federal intervention in the definition of low-performing schools vary from state to state, in large part because states' definition of "proficiency," and therefore the level of performance expected of students and schools, varies. Some states have set truly "world class" benchmarks that mark out a long-term path of school improvement; others have set short-term performance benchmarks. Based on the rigor of their benchmarks, states have established systems of sanctions and rewards. The federal government's uniform system of timelines and sanctions - within the context of widely divergent definitions of proficiency - sets up a system that may inadvertently penalize schools, districts, and states that have set their sights on rigorous, long-term goals rather than goals that are realistic in the short-term.

The Study Group strongly supports the federal government's insistence that no child be left behind. Creating a single structure of sanctions and interventions to apply to a very diverse set of state standards and assessments, however, may send inaccurate messages about the quality of some systems in relation to others and may create a disincentive for states to continue to adopt rigorous standards.

the causes of school failure. Current interventions for low-performing schools are often based upon general notions of effective teaching and learning, with little acknowledgment that potential barriers to effective teaching and learning and available resources may be very different in different environments. Even when states themselves take over the operation of a failing school or district, they invariably find that reversing a trend of chronic academic underachievement is the most complex and least successful part of their work.

- The extent to which interventions are supported by a policy and programmatic system that focuses on school improvement.

Building an Integrated Education System to Foster High Performance in Every School

Although state accountability systems have generally fallen short in providing the kinds of systematic information and assistance that low-performing schools need to improve, the good news is that there is a

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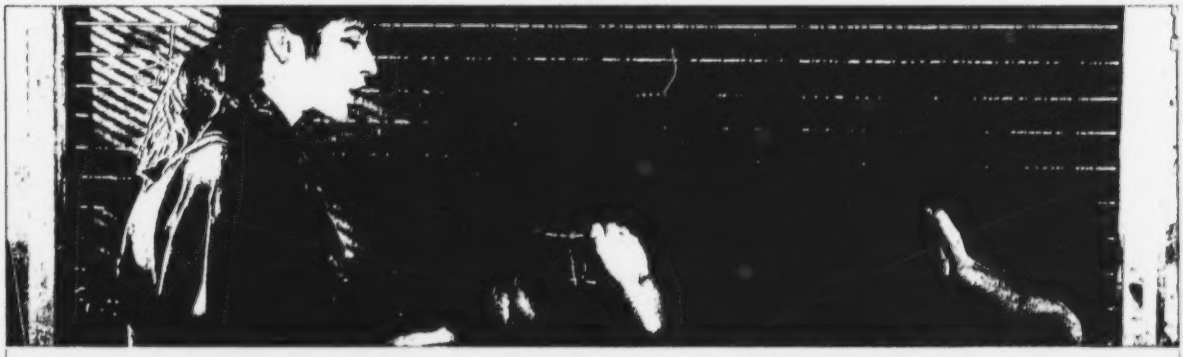

Comprehensive School Reform Programs

Growing evidence suggests that schools with chronic low performance benefit most from efforts to improve the education of *all* students and that schools that make the greatest gains in terms of student achievement tend to address school improvement with both short- and long-term strategies, with technical assistance and staff development to support reform, with a demanding curriculum, and with a focus on full implementation of reforms. In response to these sorts of findings about how to undertake school reforms most effectively, several models of comprehensive school reform have been developed. Comprehensive school reform is a systematic way of approaching school improvement that encompasses every aspect of teaching and learning, that focuses on building a whole-school environment to enable all students to succeed, that builds a framework to unify previously fragmented school programs into a single plan with shared goals, and that requires long-term collaboration among school staff, district staff, and parents.

Efforts at comprehensive school reform are grounded in the belief that piecemeal reforms can splinter school improvement efforts and divert attention from important goals. What schools need in place of piecemeal school improvement measures are research-based, replicable, systematic, whole-school processes that incorporate curriculum and instruction, assessment and evaluation, school management, professional development, scheduling, and other aspects of school reform.

In 1997, Congress created the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program (CSRD) to encourage schools to develop comprehensive school improvement plans that address nine components. In the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the program added two new components to the previous nine. Through state grants, qualifying CSRD grantee schools now receive a minimum of $50,000 per year for three years of comprehensive school reform. For fiscal year 2002, Congress has appropriated $235 million to support comprehensive reforms in schools eligible for Title I funds.

The eleven components of comprehensive school reform are listed below:

- Employs proven methods and strategies based on the results of scientific research;
- Integrates a comprehensive design with aligned components;
- Provides ongoing, high-quality professional development for teachers and staff;
- Includes measurable goals and benchmarks for student achievement;
- Is supported within the school by teachers, administrators, and staff;
- Provides support for teachers, administrators, and staff;
- Provides for meaningful parent and community involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating school improvement activities;
- Uses high-quality external technical support and assistance from an external partner with experience and expertise in school-wide reform and improvement;

- Plans for the annual evaluation of strategies for the implementation of school reforms and for student results achieved;
- Identifies resources to support and sustain the school's comprehensive reform effort; and
- Has been found to significantly improve the academic achievement of students or to demonstrate strong evidence that it will improve the academic achievement of students.

There are several complete models of school reform that are "comprehensive" in their approach. The Northwest Regional Education Laboratory's (NWREL) *Catalog of School Reform Models* currently lists twenty-seven whole-school models (online at www.nwrel.org/scpd/catalog/index.shtml). Educators and policymakers considering comprehensive school reform should be aware that results of comprehensive school reform to date have been promising but mixed.

Sources: The website of the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform, www.goodschools.gwu.edu/about_csr/index.html; Education Commission of the States, *Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons from the Field* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1999); Topper Sherwood, *A Practical Look at Comprehensive School Reform for Rural Schools* (Charleston, WV: AEL, ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1999), available online at www.ael.org/eric/digests/edorc982.htm.

growing body of information about what factors at the state, district, and school levels help low-performing schools turn around. Even more important for student achievement, a growing number of schools, districts, and states are beginning to apply that knowledge in their programs and policymaking.

Studies of schools that achieve high standards with at-risk students have been undertaken by organizations as diverse as the Heritage Foundation, the Education Trust, the Charles A. Dana Center of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Milwaukee Public School System (see Appendix II for descriptions of the studies). Although the ideological and methodological approaches of each of these four studies are very different, the message is the same: schools that serve at-risk students can and do achieve.

At the district level, there are also several examples of high achievement with high proportions of students at risk of failure. In Norfolk, Virginia, for example, the implementation of a new accountability system led to improvement in several areas, including attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement (see box on page 26). In fact, after fundamentally changing the way it does business, Norfolk posted the most improved scores of any district on Virginia's state exam.

Among states, North Carolina implemented a coordinated comprehensive school improvement program in fifteen schools, and not one of the fifteen schools remained low performing (see box on page 29). In fact, thirteen of the fifteen schools have reached exemplary status (meaning they have exceeded their expected growth rate). Kentucky has implemented a system that assigns distinguished educators from other districts to help low-performing schools. If a school continues to lag far behind its performance goals, it is assigned a state manager who evaluates the school and recommends changes. Of the fifty-three schools that were originally assigned distinguished educators in 1994, thirty-six have demonstrated sufficient improvement to leave the program.

What do these examples of success mean for the future of low-performing schools? The Study Group believes they make apparent that tolerating persistently low-performing schools and the policies, procedures, and structures that reinforce inequity is not only unnecessary but is an abrogation of the public responsibility for educating all students. State policymakers need to focus their efforts on building a system of comprehensive school improvement that measures *achievement along with capacity* and then distributes academic resources in ways that enable all schools and students to achieve. *If the Study Group could send only one message to state education policymakers, it would be that accountability is not the fundamental purpose of systems of standards and assessments—school improvement is.*

Fortunately, the experiences of schools, districts, and states that have already built systems of comprehensive school improvement provide clear direction to others who take seriously their commitment to high achievement in every school. Guiding principles for improvement include:

- Accept as a premise that no school fails because its students cannot succeed; schools fail because they and their districts fail to meet the needs of their students, and states fail to provide the information and

resources necessary to meet student needs.

- Collect and analyze several different kinds of data over time and at different levels of the system in order to accurately diagnose and treat student needs and the causes of low performance. Disaggregating student achievement data and examining quantitative and qualitative evidence of performance are important parts of finding out which students are not being adequately served and why. Fundamentally, data systems and intervention strategies need to be constructed in ways that institutionalize what is known about school improvement in a data-driven continuous improvement model.

- Focus on supporting school improvement efforts in areas that directly relate to the quality of instruction, the quality of leadership, and the quality of parent and community support, usually in that order.

- Build an integrated system to support achievement that evaluates every policy, program, practice, and expenditure in terms of its impact on achievement.

There is abundant research and experience pointing to what works in improving school performance. What is needed now is a systematic commitment and effective policy structure to take this knowledge and apply it large-scale. This report focuses on converting that knowledge into effective state policies and actions that raise all schools to high levels.

Chapter 2 discusses the characteristics of teaching, leadership, and other school characteristics that all schools need in order to achieve. It also points to key processes at the school level that need to be in place for low-performing schools to improve, and it examines ways in which states can support the development of these processes in all schools.

Chapter 3 discusses key elements of the state information and policy environment that are critical to finding low-performing schools, to diagnosing the causes of low achievement, and to intervening effectively. It also discusses technical assistance to low-performing schools, arguing that technical assistance needs to be planned in ways that take account of local needs and local resources, focus on building long-term capacity while also addressing short-term needs, and integrate into both the information and accountability systems of the district and state.

Chapter 4 discusses ways in which community resources, in the form of parent and community involvement, business partnerships, preschool, and social services, can play a role in helping schools achieve.

Chapter 5 discusses the important role of money in school improvement. The Study Group argues that this issue is complex and often misunderstood, and it points out ways that states can use money in targeted ways to support school improvement.

In the words of one former long-time teacher who is now active in school reform, "It used to be that if a student failed, a teacher's attitude was, 'I taught it. You didn't learn it.' Now, with schools being judged by how students perform, the idea is, 'My students have not been taught until they have learned.'"

Maryland Business Roundtable for Education
http://www.mbrt.org/achievin.htm

Among all levels of education practice and policy, schools are the single most important factor in improving student achievement. It is at the school level that elements of effective instruction, high-quality curriculum, effective leadership, student motivation, and high-quality instruction come together to build an environment that is directly and consistently engaged in the practice of teaching and learning. It is also at the building level that state and local policies and programs merge to impact a school's effectiveness in helping students achieve.

Acknowledging the critical role of schools, states focus their most powerful sanctions, rewards, and interventions at the school level. Much of the impetus for state systems of standards and accountability has been the belief that accountability—and the sanctions and rewards tied to it—will drive school improvement. Chapter 1 points out a fundamental flaw in this assumption, however: systems that focus on assessment and designation of low achievement fail to take account of the fundamental systematic and capacity issues that perpetuate low achievement.

The bottom line for all schools—and the most critical component in any effort to improve those that are failing—is developing the knowledge and capacity within every school to foster rigorous teaching and learning across the curriculum. This requires relentlessly targeting resources in ways that develop capacity and building an improvement paradigm that reduces variation in achievement across schools by bringing everyone to expected levels. In general, transforming low-performing schools into centers of learning means a set of attitudes, programs, policies, and achievement measures that inform a developmental approach, rather than a sorting system of school improvement.

Chapter 2

Transforming Low-Performing Schools into Centers of Learning

Supporting a developmental approach to student achievement and building school capacity requires several elements to be put in place at the school level: leadership, teacher quality, professional development, curriculum, and a data-driven plan for continuous improvement. It also requires states and districts to examine their policies and practices in relation to these elements to ensure that all schools have the resources and capacity they need to bring students to high standards.

This chapter describes the five critical elements common to high-performing schools. Any team of individuals charged with turning around a low-performing school will want to ensure that the school develops these important characteristics of success. They are at the same time both easy to

understand yet often maddeningly difficult to create in a school. Throughout this chapter, readers will find specific ways in which district and state policies and programs can positively impact schools as they develop their own capacity as well as the capacity of every student in their charge.

Element 1. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Effective School Leadership

Maryland's Distinguished Principal Fellow Program

As part of a new school leadership program, the Maryland State Department of Education has designated three area principals as Distinguished Principal Fellows. The fellows were selected from a pool of applicants who answered a challenge to turn around failing schools in Baltimore City. The program was supported by Maryland elected officials who, as part of the legislation extending the 1997 city-state partnership governing Baltimore schools, established the program to appoint distinguished principals from outside the Baltimore system to work with principals-in-training. The fellows are paid $125,000 per year. Each is expected to work three years at an assigned low-performing city school, where he or she will train principal interns from within the city system. Along with the principal interns, each fellow will have an "Action Support Team" consisting of teacher mentors as well as at least one additional support team member targeted to the needs of the individual schools.

The first three distinguished fellows signed their new contracts on July 19, 2002; principals-in-training have been selected and deployed to the host schools; and action teams have been put in place. Fellows will lead two elementary schools and one middle school. Educators in Baltimore schools expect to see changes in staffing, leadership, and environment at each of the host schools. Maryland officials indicate that they are optimistic about the program and also expect that it will take some time to fully assess its impact. More information about the program, including program applications, can be found on the Maryland Department of Education website at www.mse.state.md.us.

Effective schools research of the last twenty years, combined with research that examines the critical components necessary to turn around low-performing schools, makes clear the importance of good leadership. The Heritage Foundation (see Appendix II) actually finds that *the* key factor in successful, high-poverty schools is a strong school leader.[14] The Milwaukee Effective Schools Study (see Appendix II) arrived at a similar conclusion, arguing for the importance of principals who communicate with each staff member regularly, understand the kinds of investments that need to be made to improve student achievement, and work hard for teacher buy-in and shared leadership.[15] Other studies arrive at similar conclusions about the importance of school leadership in fostering a school culture and implementing school programs geared toward high student achievement.

Effective school leadership fosters at least five facets of success found in high-performing schools:[16]

- A vision of learning and goals that are shared by everyone in the school. Effective school leaders foster a collective vision among staff and students that focuses on learning and assumes that all students can achieve. The leaders support the development of rigorous academic programs and staff professional development to make it happen.
- A program of ongoing evaluation to monitor student progress. Effective school leaders ensure that student performance data is used to monitor student progress and intervene when students need extra help. Whenever necessary, they

State and District Actions

Element 1. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Effective School Leadership

District Actions to Provide High-Quality Leadership for All Schools

The district often allocates resources, incentives, and assistance in ways that encourage or discourage qualified leaders from choosing assignments in schools that need them most. Districts that take seriously the development of high achievement among all students should consider several actions:

1. Provide incentives to work in schools that need improvement. For example, leaders could receive *extra* years toward retirement, *extra* support personnel, *extra* remuneration, *smaller* student bodies, *better* equipped libraries, or *more* professional development. Signing bonuses, relocation packages, and tuition reimbursement may also help attract high-quality candidates.

2. Provide long-term contracts for school leaders. School improvement does not always happen overnight. Some districts lose patience during the wait. Providing a multi-year contract is one way to encourage a leader to make tough short-term decisions that may have long-terms gains.

3. Provide professional development to school leaders that emphasizes visionary, collaborative leadership and focuses on instruction. This may include mentoring relationships between new and experienced leaders, training for all leaders in critical skill areas and based upon the specific needs of their school, and time for leaders from across the district to share strategies for school improvement.

State Actions to Provide High-Quality Leadership for All Schools

States set standards for school leaders, set licensure criteria for school leaders, and oversee the content and quality of preparation programs for school leaders. In other words, the quantity and quality of the pool of qualified school leaders from which districts can hire is a direct result of state policies. There are several actions that states can take to ensure that districts have a sufficient pool of high-quality school leaders:

1. Develop standards and evaluation systems that hold all school leaders to a set of knowledge and skills related to effective school leadership. These standards need to be applied to school leader preparation programs as well.

2. Build policies that give districts the freedom, resources, and data they need to attract high-quality leadership in schools. State policies can impede districts' efforts to recruit and hire qualified leaders. For example, requiring school leaders to have a specific number of years working as a teacher may exclude some promising candidates who have fewer years than necessary. It is important that state policymakers undertake a consistent process of policy review that examines existing policies in light of current goals and strategies.

3. Designate funds to ensure all schools have the resources they need to attract and retain high-quality school leaders.

4. Encourage preparation programs to locate in communities that need school leaders. Locating preparation programs in communities that need leaders can encourage those in the local community who are considering a position in school leadership, may attract candidates to the local area via the preparation program, and may provide interns to help principals in local schools.

5. Review preparation program requirements for school leaders to ensure they foster the skills and dispositions of effective leadership. NASBE's 1999 Study Group on School Leadership found that effective preparation for school leaders meets several criteria: the programs are competitive; develop philosophical and intellectual perspectives on schools; link theory to practice, implement innovative course schedules; develop principals who are able and willing to go where they are needed; forge partnerships with local school districts; and require rigorous, supervised internships.[17]

6. Establish induction and mentorship programs to support new school leaders.

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provide training and support to staff on how to use data to make decisions about instruction. They also invest time collecting and analyzing data to evaluate the effectiveness of classroom and school-wide programs and practices.

- A safe, disciplined learning environment. Effective school leaders work with staff and families to curb discipline and attendance problems, which can seriously impact student achievement.

- Collaborative relationships with families and community organizations. Effective school leaders understand that parental involvement can improve student achievement, and they also know that community organizations can provide important resources to improve student achievement. Effective leaders have the cultural competency and political know-how to draw families and community organizations into the school improvement process.[18]

- An assumption that school improvement is an ongoing process. Effective school leaders foster a view among staff that their pursuit of academic excellence is ongoing. Using a data-driven continuous improvement model, staff at effective schools are able to fine-tune their programs and practices over the long term with the belief that "the sky is the limit" in terms of teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Recruiting principals with these characteristics is a challenge, however. Shortages are particularly acute in urban, high-poverty schools—those most likely to be low performing—where principals are paid comparatively less than their suburban counterparts, face more challenges, and work with fewer supports.[19]

Element 2. Schools and Students Need High-Quality Teachers

Low-performing schools cannot be turned around without high-quality teachers. Studies that look at the impact of teachers on student learning have found that measures of teacher expertise accounted for more variation in student reading and math achievement in grades 1 to 11 than students' socioeconomic status.[20] Other studies in Tennessee, Boston, and Dallas have found that students who are assigned to ineffective teachers for several years in a row have significantly lower achievement and lower gains than students assigned to highly effective teachers.[21]

What makes a teacher "high quality"?

Different groups from across the ideological spectrum have developed different answers to the question of what makes a teacher "high quality." Some believe that requiring teachers to be fully licensed and have a graduate degree is a good step toward improving teacher quality. Others point out that the relationship between traditional teacher licensure and teacher quality is unproven. They suggest that broadening the pool of potential teachers by recruiting individuals with exceptional academic records and important work experience may be a good way to improve teacher quality. Regardless of the actual relationship between teacher licensure and teacher quality, federal legislation now requires states and districts to hire only licensed teachers.

Despite disagreement about the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher quality, most experts agree on four criteria shared by high-quality teachers:

Content knowledge. High-quality teachers know the subject they are teaching well and score well on tests of general verbal ability.[22] This knowledge may be developed in university teacher preparation programs, or it may be developed during professional experiences unrelated to teaching.

Pedagogical knowledge. Good teachers know how to communicate their subject matter to students, and they know how to evaluate student learning and change teaching techniques in response to student needs. Pedagogical knowledge also implies having adequate cultural competency to know how to communicate with diverse student populations.

Clinical experience. Good teachers have had ample opportunity to hone their skills in classroom situations under the guidance of experienced teachers. For some teachers, this experience may be gained during student teaching. For others, it may consist of working with an experienced mentor during an alternative preparation program. Some may gain the experience they need by teaching at a private school or teaching in higher education.

Stability. Not only do teachers need exceptional content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and clinical experience, but the teacher workforce needs to be stable. New teachers often take several years to become "proficient" at teaching. Losing teachers in the first few years means they never reach "proficiency," and in schools where attrition is chronic, students are consistently

The Relationship between Teacher Licensure and Teacher Quality

Traditionally, candidates to become licensed teachers have been measured according to three primary criteria: the possession of a degree from an approved college or university; the completion of an approved program of teacher preparation, including several weeks of student teaching; and, more recently, satisfactory scores on a written test of pedagogical, subject-specific, and general knowledge. These criteria have been criticized because they do not take into account teachers' skills in teaching. Evidence is clear that knowing facts is very different from doing a good job, and so most licensure programs provide little assurance of the quality of teachers' performance in the classroom. These licensure criteria have also been criticized because many licensure tests measure minimum competencies rather than advanced knowledge or skills.

Although the relationship between most states' criteria for licensure and high-quality teaching remains unproven, new federal legislation concerning "highly qualified teachers" defines "highly qualified" as a teacher who possesses a college degree and passes state licensure tests.

In order to receive full Title I funding, states need to adopt this federal definition of a "highly-qualified teacher," but they don't need to stop there. States that take seriously providing a high-quality - rather than highly qualified - teacher for every class need to build teacher licensure requirements that require teacher candidates to demonstrate that they have the necessary knowledge and can apply that knowledge appropriately in real-life circumstances in schools. This kind of teacher knowledge and skill is best measured using multiple lines of evidence over time.

Connecticut has devised a system of Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) that requires beginning teachers to complete a portfolio and a series of teaching observations, in close collaboration with an experienced teacher mentor, that demonstrate they have met or exceeded minimum *performance* standards in order to receive a license. The state has found that requiring new teachers to examine their own practice in reference to state standards has increased the quality and stability of newly licensed teachers while simultaneously making teaching a more desirable and competitive career within the state overall.

Adapted from National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), *The Numbers Game: Ensuring Quantity and Quality in the Teaching Work Force* (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 1998), 38-40.

taught by teachers who are unlikely to have reached their best practice.

Schools that foster staff stability can see significant improvement in the quality of a school. Highly effective high-poverty elementary schools in Milwaukee, for example, have high numbers of teachers with ten or more years of experience and very low rates of staff turnover. Principals find that these teachers become leaders, and if they buy in to school improvement measures, they can lead newer staff down the same path.[23]

Studies of high-poverty, high-achieving schools have pointed out specific attitudes and practices adopted by teachers that contribute to the development of high achievement among all students:[24]

- Teachers set high expectations for every student and do not accept excuses for failure.
- Teachers alter their instructional practices to meet the needs of their students.
- Teachers create an environment of mutual respect and understanding.
- Teachers use data (often from formative assessments) to guide instruction.
- Teachers collaborate within and across departments and grade levels around academic goals.

Despite clear evidence that high-quality teachers are a critical element to bringing all students to high standards, schools, districts, and states

continue to tolerate the reality that high-quality teachers are not distributed equitably to schools and students. Teachers in high-poverty schools tend to be less qualified than teachers in low-poverty schools, and African American students are considerably more likely than white students to have ineffective teachers.[25] In urban, high-poverty schools, half of all new teachers leave within five years.

A study of New York City provides a striking example of the clear difference in the quality of teachers in low-performing schools and in schools that are not low performing:[26]

- Nearly 30 percent of teachers at low-performing elementary schools are neither fully licensed nor permanently assigned. At high-performing schools in the city, less than 8 percent of teachers are in this category.
- 35 percent of teachers at low-performing schools have less than five years of teaching experience, compared to 24 percent at high-performing schools.
- Teachers in low-performing schools have a 10 percent higher absentee rate than those in high-performing schools.
- In low-performing middle schools, more than one-third of teachers were neither fully licensed nor permanently assigned, compared to 13.6 percent of teachers in high-performing schools.
- Among schools that moved out of low-performing status in a year, measures of teacher quality were higher than in schools that retained the low-performing status.

Ensuring that all students have the opportunity to benefit from working with high-quality teachers is a key component to improving student performance and a critical part of turning around many low-performing schools.

Element 3. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Teachers who Participate in High-Quality, Targeted Professional Development

Professional development matters: teachers with more professional growth opportunities are more effective than teachers with fewer opportunities.[27] Particularly in low-performing schools—which have more than their share of unlicensed teachers, teachers teaching out of their field, and ineffective teachers—high-quality professional development is "the linchpin of teacher quality."[28]

High-poverty, high-performing schools often differ from high-poverty, low-performing schools in that they devote a larger portion of funds to professional development

Teachers Are at the Center of School Improvement

During the 1980s and '90s, states' reform efforts have differed widely. Some states focused heavily on statewide student testing, while others focused on enacting high standards for teachers. Twelve states scoring the highest on the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1996 instituted high licensing standards for teachers, but did not implement statewide testing programs during the 1980s or early 1990s. By contrast, the twelve lowest-scoring states had extensive student testing programs in place prior to 1990 with notably low standards for teacher licensure and hiring. States should conduct a careful review of their testing, rewards, sanctions, and support systems to determine who it is holding accountable and how.

Adapted from Linda Darling-Hammond, *Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, 1999).

State and District Actions

Element 2. Schools and Students Need High-Quality Teachers

District Actions to Provide High-Quality Teachers for All Schools

In most cases, districts have primary responsibility for ensuring that their corps of teachers is high quality. Consequently, districts should consider several actions in relation to teacher assignments in low-performing schools:

1. Provide resources. Districts should keep in mind that school improvement may require schools to have *more* personnel, *more* incentives to attract and retain teachers, *more* funds for professional development, and *more* high-quality curricular materials than an average school.

2. Provide incentives for teachers to work in schools that need improvement. Districts may consider offering *extra* years toward retirement, *extra* classroom aides, *extra* remuneration, *smaller* classes, *more* planning time, or *more* professional development to teachers who work in schools in need of improvement.

3. Negotiate contracts with teacher collective bargaining units that place the best teachers in the schools that need them most. Teacher contracts often stipulate that teachers with seniority are more able to choose their teaching assignments than new teachers. Districts may need to work with their unions in order to establish systems that place the most effective and experienced teachers in the schools with the greatest needs.

4. Develop far-reaching recruitment strategies. Some districts may also have the capacity to develop alternate routes to licensure that recruit paraprofessionals and others from the community into teaching and train them in rigorous programs that are flexible to the needs of adult learners.

State Actions to Provide High-Quality Teachers for All Schools

States are responsible for developing teacher standards, setting teacher licensure criteria, and overseeing teacher preparation programs. There are several actions that states can take to ensure that districts have a sufficient pool of high-quality teachers:

1. Adopt teacher standards that set high expectations for teacher knowledge and skills and develop teacher support and evaluation systems that ensure all teachers meet these standards. These standards need to be aligned with other components of the state's standards and accountability system, as well as with teacher preparation, licensure, and professional development. Teacher preparation programs also need to be held to high standards for program content and rigor as well as for the amount and quality of practical experience teacher candidates receive.

2. Support districts in the development of recruitment strategies and incentives to attract high-quality teachers to schools that need them most. States need to ensure that districts have the capacity and resources necessary to develop recruitment strategies and incentive packages to attract the teachers they need.

3. Develop comprehensive new teacher induction programs that include mentorships and formative evaluation. States, such as Connecticut, that have established comprehensive new teacher induction programs have found them to be highly effective tools to improve teacher quality and teacher retention in the long run.

4. Review all state policies and programs to ensure they support the development, recruitment, and retention of high-quality teachers in the schools that need them most. Policymakers should implement a regular policy review process that examines existing policies in light of current goals.

5. Locate teacher preparation programs in geographic areas that need teachers. Teacher preparation programs can augment the supply of teachers in their local areas because teacher candidates may be recruited locally and candidates who relocate to attend a preparation program may decide to stay.

6. Expand alternate routes to licensure. When designed appropriately, alternate routes to teacher licensure can attract highly qualified, non-traditional candidates into teaching and provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to be highly effective teachers in the schools that need them most.

State and District Actions

Element 3. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Teachers who Participate in High-Quality, Targeted Professional Development

District Actions to Provide High-Quality Professional Development for All Schools

1. Provide funds for low-performing schools to access appropriate professional development. Because schools in need of improvement often have more needs than they do resources to apply to meeting their needs, school districts may need to support critical professional development.

2. Provide information and assistance to help schools select the most appropriate professional development experience for their particular needs. Some low-performing schools may not have the expertise on staff to choose appropriate professional development to meet their needs. In such cases, districts should advise schools about high-quality professional development opportunities.

3. Evaluate professional development providers and the programs they offer in terms of their impact on student achievement and make this analysis available to schools. The primary goal of professional development needs to be improved student achievement. Districts can provide valuable information to schools by evaluating programs in terms of measurable impacts on learning.

4. Provide funds for teacher release time for professional development activities, and encourage scheduling that allows shared planning time among teachers. Not all professional development activities take place outside of school hours or on staff development days. Often, it is useful for teachers to observe each others' classes, for teachers to visit other schools to observe effective practices, or for teachers to share planning time during school hours.

State Actions to Provide High-Quality Professional Development for All Schools

1. Provide a structure for the evaluation of professional development programs in relation to state standards. Where local districts and schools do not have the capacity to evaluate professional development opportunities in terms of their impact on meeting state standards, states may provide a framework to help schools and districts link standards to professional development.

2. Provide professional development at a reasonable cost to schools and districts in critical areas of school improvement. States may consider developing their own professional development program, based on their standards and data concerning the shared needs of schools in the state, and offer this program to schools and districts at a reasonable cost.

3. Consider designating funds to support more release time for professional development and effective professional development programming for schools that have the greatest need. Some low-performing schools are located in districts that have very limited capacity to support effective school improvement. In these cases, the state may consider designating state funds to support effective professional development practices.

4. Disseminate examples of promising practices. At times, schools and districts fail to adopt effective programs and practices because they lack information. It may help for states to disseminate information about promising practices and effective elements of professional development.

that focuses on changing instructional practices among teachers.[29] Often, these high-performing, high-poverty schools spent 10 percent or more of their Title I funds on professional development, compared to about 2 to 6 percent in other Title I schools and districts.[30] High-poverty, high-performing schools also offer staff development in many forms and at many times during the year and select topics according to what teachers identify as their greatest areas of need in terms of meeting the goals of the school's instructional plan.[31] Often, they provide time during the school day for teachers to collaborate on instructional improvement and student needs.

The good news is that we know what constitutes high-quality professional development.[32] High-quality professional development shares the following characteristics:[33]

- Is rigorous, ongoing, school-based, and embedded in teacher work;
- Has as its primary goal improving student learning, and is evaluated according to this goal;
- Includes training, practice, feedback, opportunities for reflection and group inquiry, and coaching or other follow-up procedures;
- Is collaborative and provides opportunities for teachers to interact with peers;
- Encourages school-based and teacher initiatives;
- Is rooted in the knowledge bases for teaching, subject matter, and student needs;
- Is an important part of the normal school day;
- Recognizes teachers as professional learners and is often teacher designed and directed;
- Helps teachers meet the needs of *all* students; and
- Takes account of specific school contexts.

Element 6. Successful Schools Have a Good Curriculum and Instructional Supports

Good teachers are critical in fostering high performance, but they cannot do it alone. Teachers need high-quality curriculum and instruction in order to impact student achievement. A study in North Carolina found, for example, that regardless of students' prior academic experiences, given a rigorous curriculum with challenging tasks and appropriate assessments in small settings, kids learn.[34] Another study points out the pernicious nature of under-performance: of non-proficient eighth graders, 85 percent will stay that way through high schools. The 15 percent of under-performing students who do manage to break the mold have done so by being exposed to an intensive academic high school curriculum.[35]

What does it mean to offer a good curriculum that brings all students to their potential? The Study Group has found that good curricula share at least six characteristics:

A good curriculum is engaging. Good curriculum and instruction comprises content and learning activities that actively engage students. For example, there is a negative relationship between the amount of dittos assigned to students and student test scores, and a positive relationship between student test scores and instruction that asks students to discuss work with each other.[36] In *Dispelling the Myth*, successful principals reported that student test scores improved when teachers decreased the use of dittos and increased class discussion of student work.[37]

Unfortunately, engaging curricula that ask students to think and discuss their ideas are implemented in schools in inequitable ways; while only 15 percent of white twelfth graders are exposed to a curriculum that asks them to complete daily ditto worksheets, 23 percent of Latino and 24 percent of African American twelfth graders are.[38]

A good curriculum is institutionalized. Good curriculum and instruction are not hit-and-miss. The benefits of good curriculum in terms of student learning accrete over time, and so the most effective curriculum is one that builds systematically over the students' years in school. Curricular institutionalization may take place at the school, district, or state levels, but the higher the level of institutionalization, the greater opportunity all students have to benefit.

It follows that when curriculum is aligned with assessments, students do better. The key is to ensure that the content of standards and assessments in fact represents the curriculum we want students to learn. At the moment, there is a fundamental mismatch between what is taught in low-performing schools and what is assessed by state, district, or standardized tests.[39]

High-poverty, high-achieving schools in Milwaukee attribute part of their academic success to a

process of curricular institutionalization that engages staff in constructing specific learning outcomes for each grade and for individual teachers, based on standards. Specific teaching and learning items related to learning outcomes are discussed by committees of teachers and administrators, and principals visit classrooms often to see the extent to which the shared educational action plan is being put in place in each classroom.[40]

A good curriculum uses assessment wisely. When assessments become an integral part of the curriculum rather than standing apart from it, assessments can become the tool that targets instruction and drives learning. Good curriculum and instruction, in other words, relies upon good formative assessment and iterative learning to fine-tune instruction and focus on individual student needs. Even better, good formative assessment need not take time away from instruction. In fact, good formative assessment can be indistinguishable from good instruction. In general, any activity that provides information to students and teachers about learning and that provides feedback to modify teaching and learning to meet student needs is *formative assessment.*

Formative assessment, when designed and implemented by schools to provide immediate feedback to students and their teachers that is directly related to the curriculum, can improve students' standardized test scores more than many other educational interventions. This holds true across students in elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as for university students, across subjects, and in several different countries. Furthermore, formative assessment is particularly important for low-performing schools and students because it has its greatest impact on achievement for students who are not doing well in school.[41]

The Howard County Public School system in Maryland has a high-quality system of formative assessment, aligned with Maryland's learning outcomes, that is carried out by schools with district support. Furthermore, the district provides technical assistance to its low-performing schools in how to administer and apply the results of these assessments to improve student achievement.

A good curriculum focuses on literacy. Reading is the basis on which all academic successes are built, more than income, age, ethnicity, or level of parental education.[42] Furthermore, when students and teachers increase the frequency of their informative writing assignments, student scores increase not only on writing assessments, but also in mathematics, science, social studies, and reading.[43] Therefore, good curriculum and instruction focuses

State and District Actions

Element 4. Successful Schools Have a Good Curriculum and Instructional Supports

District Actions to Provide High-Quality Curriculum for All Schools

In low-performing schools, even a high-quality curriculum can be implemented in ways that lessen its effectiveness. Districts can help schools implement appropriate, effective curriculum if they:

1. Build elements of effective curricular content and delivery into school evaluation criteria. District-administered school evaluation systems should evaluate both curricular content and delivery and provide constructive feedback to schools on ways to improve both.

2. Ensure that curriculum is aligned with state standards.

3. Ensure that teachers accelerate the curriculum for students who fall behind.

State Actions to Provide High-Quality Curriculum for All Schools

1. Support district initiatives. States should ensure that the policies and programs adopted by state policymakers facilitate, rather than impede, high-quality work at the local level.

2. Develop curricular frameworks. For example, Missouri has developed curricular frameworks that are aligned with their state standards and tied to the content of state assessments.

3. Disseminate examples of promising practices to low-performing schools. This may include sponsor visits between schools to observe promising practices in action.

on literacy and writing, particularly in the early years. An examination of case study data at the classroom, school, district, and state levels indicates that when students write more frequently and when they score higher on writing performance assessments, their scores on multiple-choice tests improve. In another study, science was taught for one-and-a-half hours each week while five hours each week were spent on literacy: science scores doubled. More writing in the classroom may, indeed, take time away from other subjects, but it does not hinder test scores or student achievement in general.[44]

A good curriculum accelerates and varies instruction for students who fall behind. Without acceleration, low-performing schools and students can only fall farther and farther behind. And without multiple instructional techniques, students who fail to understand a particular concept have no alternative ways to approach the information. Students who fall behind need to be immersed in learning and have access to different explanations and demonstrations of the concept at work.

A good curriculum takes time to deliver. Delivering high-quality curriculum and instruction takes time. Many schools that achieve high standards with at-risk students understand this. For example, eight out of ten high-poverty, high-performing schools included in the Education Trust's *Dispelling the Myth* study increased instructional time in reading and math to improve student achievement.[45] Many high-poverty, high-performing schools add before- and after-school academic programs and Saturday and summer instruction options to increase the time they can commit to reading, writing, and math instruction.[46]

More important than allocating instructional time to reading, writing, and math, however, is maximizing the amount of allocated time in which students are actively engaged in learning. As David Berliner notes, academic learning time is a complex measure of "that part of allocated time in a subject-matter area in which a student is engaged successfully in the activities or with the materials to which he or she is exposed, and in which those activities and materials are related to educational outcomes that are valued."[47] Maximizing academic learning time is a difficult but powerful element of effective curricular delivery.

Element 5. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Staff to Make Frequent and Appropriate Use of Data to Inform Continuous Improvement

Improving leadership, teaching, professional development, and curriculum are critically important elements of school improvement, and improving one or more of these can make a significant impact on school quality. However, school improvement efforts can plateau early unless strategies for school improvement are based on data that illuminate root causes of low performance and help schools prioritize their needs. Schools that serve high proportions of at-risk students and that truly excel at improving teaching and learning do it by gathering and analyzing data often and basing decisions about school, classroom, and student interventions on diagnostic information. Characteristics of quality data systems include: using the information for diagnostic purposes to identify achievement gaps early; using data to prioritize actions on the most critical factors impeding achievement; providing timely information to inform instruction; and focusing on explanations as well as outcome measures. Indeed, data are at the center of any effective model of continuous improvement.

There are at least two different decisions to make about the kind of data to be gathered: whether the purpose of the data is to provide formative or summative information, and whether the question at hand should be answered using qualitative or quantitative data.

Formative and summative data. *Formative data* measure ongoing processes. Among students, formative data from classroom assignments, teacher observations, and curriculum-embedded evaluations can help students understand their own learning and can help teachers make ongoing decisions about instruction based on measures of specific and immediate student instructional needs. At the school level, formative data concerning program and curricular effectiveness can provide timely measures of ways in which these elements impact school progress toward goals. Teachers can also receive immediate feedback on the content and quality of their teaching in relation to the goals of the school improvement plan. The purpose of formative evaluation is primarily to diagnose learning or programmatic gaps and reveal topics, skills, and processes that can be implemented immediately to improve effectiveness. Teachers and schools can use formative assessments to adjust programs and learning experiences according to the specific needs of individual students.

Summative data are used to measure student learning or program outcomes at a terminal point, often the end of a course or the end of a school year. These data usually do not directly inform instruction, and they are often used for high-stakes decisions, like course grades, promotion, graduation, or school-level sanctions.

Quantitative and qualitative data. *Quantitative data* can be expressed as a number such as an assessment score. Quantitative data are ideally suited to capturing information about outcomes and correlations. *Qualitative data* include information from sources such as interviews, observations, essays, and the like. At the most basic level, qualitative data are ideally suited to capturing information about complex *processes* and underlying factors. Qualitative and quantitative data can both be either formative or summative, depending upon the information needs.

Data-driven approaches to continuous school improvement usually make effective use of all kinds of data. Kate Laguarda from Policy Studies Associates and Douglas Reeves from the Center for Performance Assessment emphasize the importance of focusing on data that can examine *explanatory factors* that are linked to outcome measures and that provide *diagnostic* information about student performance. These data are often formative and qualitative in nature, and so, if the primary purpose of data is to support high-quality learning, then formative assessment and qualitative evaluation ought to be understood as the most critical measures of teaching and learning at the school level.

Once data are gathered, a powerful system of data-driven decision-making takes at least five actions:

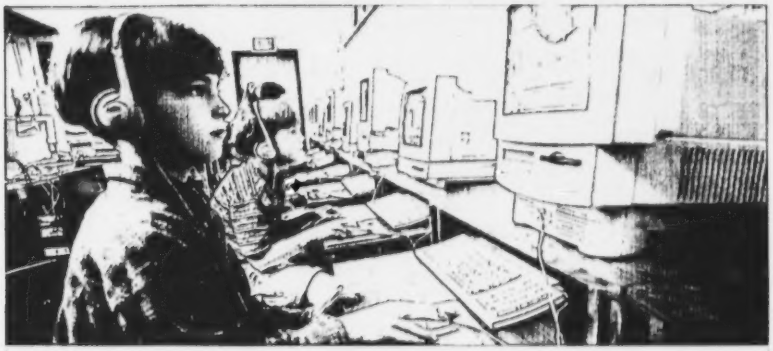
Analyze. Data are only useful if they are analyzed well. Teachers and schools that take seriously the application of a data-driven decision-making process need to analyze data in ways that will provide information to inform key decisions about teaching and learning. For example, teachers who use data to ensure that their instruction of a particular topic was effective may want to evaluate student performance data in several ways: by individual students to inform decisions about continued instruction, by groups of students to discern if classroom practices and curriculum were more effective for some groups of students than others, and question-by-question to evaluate whether the chosen curriculum and instructional methods communicated some

The Impact of Student Mobility on Achievement

Each year, between 20 and 30 percent of primary school children change schools, and one in six third graders have attended at least three different schools since the beginning of first grade. In low-performing schools, mobility rates are often higher than average, and some schools experience student mobility rates as high as 40 to 50 percent.

High rates of student mobility can be a problem for several reasons: first, schools that receive transferring students may find it hard to place students appropriately, particularly if a student arrives without previous school records. High student mobility also correlates with lower student test scores, higher rates of grade retention, and, at the high school level, higher rates of dropout.

To help minimize the impact of mobility on students, some districts have created "welcome centers" that test and place all incoming students prior to sending them into the classroom. Other districts have created "open enrollment" policies that allow students to continue to attend their old school even if they move across school boundaries within the district. In New Jersey, Trenton and Newark have found that maintaining a centralized database of student information is an efficient way to share student information from school to school.



The Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence

Congress created the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1987 to recognize companies that meet high standards of performance and organizational management. Administered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Baldrige Award is intended both to recognize and to celebrate high-quality companies and to highlight best practices so that companies around the country can benefit from their expertise. In 1998, Congress extended the Baldrige National Quality Award to education and health care organizations, and NIST issued quality criteria specifically designed for educational and health care institutions.

Baldrige criteria are built upon the following eleven core values and concepts: visionary leadership; learning-centered education; organizational and personal learning; valuing faculty, staff, and partners; agility; focus on the future; managing for innovation; management by fact; public responsibility and citizenship; focus on results and creating value; and systems perspective. The Baldrige evaluation process focuses upon data-driven continuous improvement.

Several districts and some states have experienced considerable success in their school improvement efforts by adopting the Baldrige criteria. For example, Quality New Jersey and New York's Empire State Advantage are two of fifty-six state and local award programs that have adopted or adapted the model of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Elements of the Baldrige criteria have also influenced school reform in North Carolina, where student achievement on almost every measure has increased alongside the implementation of school reform.

A complete description of the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence can be found at www.quality.nist.gov. More information on state and local use of the Baldrige criteria for school improvement can be found in the National Education Goals Panel report, *Strategies for Meeting High Standards: Quality Management and the Baldrige Criteria in Education* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 2000).

elements of the desired knowledge and skills more effectively than others.

Disaggregate. A powerful system of data-driven decision-making disaggregates data for analysis according to several variables. Because aggregated data can obscure the performance of individual students and subgroups of students, it cannot answer core questions about exactly which students are achieving and exactly what is being achieved. Disaggregating student performance data helps schools refine their focus for school improvement interventions, and disaggregated results may help educators decide what kind of evidence needs to be gathered in more formative and qualitative ways to disentangle the reasons for poor performance among students and certain groups of students.

Prioritize. Effective school improvement requires staff to use data to select a small number of primary improvement goals, based on data, and then to align school improvement planning, professional development, curriculum, and program selection accordingly. Evidence from high-performing, high-poverty schools suggests that targeting a small set of indicators that are most directly related to teaching, curriculum, and leadership helps focus staff on specific, doable tasks.[48]

Apply. In addition to frequently gathering and analyzing several kinds of data, schools need to know how to analyze and apply information about performance and how to share appropriate information with their communities, families, and local and state policymakers. Change rarely happens overnight, and school improvement is no exception.

Collect again. Powerful accountability systems gather data with sufficient frequency to allow for

District Accountability Systems for Higher Student Achievement: The Norfolk, Virginia Public Schools

The Norfolk Public School System (NPSS) adopted a highly successful, multi-tiered, data-driven accountability system in order to turn around low-performing schools. In creating the program, leaders from several elementary and secondary schools, specialists from the district office, and the local school board created a vision of school improvement and a system of accountability that focuses on the *quality of teaching and learning at the school level.* They also developed indicators of *district support for teaching and learning* and constructed an accountability system to evaluate district contributions to school improvement. The program is also designed to ensure that all elements are *aligned with each other and relate to teaching and learning.* Finally, the school improvement and accountability system is designed with internal review systems to support the continuous refinement of school improvement strategies.

NPSS created this system of accountability for school improvement in response to an earlier system under which student test scores and a few other common school performance indicators were collected but provided only a small part of a very important story about student achievement in the district. School leaders decided that in order to understand the *causes* of low achievement, teachers and administrators needed information about elements of teaching and learning. These elements ideally could provide specific information - such as direct instructional interventions - to improve learning.

Based on what NPSS learned about student needs and instructional quality in its schools from its new, comprehensive data collection and analysis system, it adopted a reform program with several important components. Dr. Thomas Lockamy, superintendent of the Norfolk Public School System, noted the following factors as essential to improving student achievement in the district:

- Increased and sustained professional development for teachers and administrators;
- Smaller class sizes in struggling schools;
- Extended learning time, including year-round school, summer school, before- and after-school tutorials, and Saturday enrichment opportunities;
- Clear expectations for students and staff;
- Increased parental involvement;
- Laser-like focus at the school and district levels on instruction and assessment;
- Increased emphasis on reading and math in the early primary grades and a K-12 reading initiative;
- Increased community partnerships and mentoring programs;
- Disaggregating and monitoring student achievement data;
- Use of multiple formative assessments, e.g., portfolios; and
- Focus on leadership and training.

The local school board also formed its own system of board accountability to ensure its work focused on teaching and learning. For example, the board analyzed the percentage of time on the board agenda that is spent addressing academic issues.

The improvements in student achievement as a result of the NPSS data-driven, instructionally focused accountability system have been dramatic:

- 100 percent of high schools in Norfolk have raised their SAT scores;
- More students in NPSS are now taking the PSAT than any other school division in Virginia;
- More students are winning national medals for achievement in foreign languages;
- Enrollment in the district's International Baccalaureate program exceeds capacity;
- The district claims twelve of sixteen schools with the best attendance records in the state; and
- Norfolk also posted the most improved scores, overall and across all subgroups, on Virginia's state assessment.

continuous models of improvement and ongoing "early warning" monitoring of schools at risk of becoming low performing. Thus, each cycle of data collection is the beginning of a new cycle of improvement efforts that move the quality of the school steadily upward over time.

Improving schools that are chronically low performing may require years of systematic capacity-building efforts. In Milwaukee, for example, real improvements in student achievement that took hold as a result of structured school improvement efforts didn't emerge for two to four years after the start of reform.[49] Long-term institutional improvement also often occurs in short-term jolts and stages. Consequently, investing in long-term school improvement may require patience among policymakers, administrators, and the general public as schools take "three steps forward and one step back" over the course of several years.

There are several examples of what data-driven decision-making looks like at the level of individual student achievement and school decision-making. Many *Dispelling the Myth* and Dana Center schools use formative assessment to monitor individual student progress and define necessary extra supports as soon as any trouble in student achievement is detected.[50] The Milwaukee Public School District personnel constantly evaluate student and school achievement data to determine which goals and strategies should be the main focus of attention. The district operates "data-driven seminars" to help local administrators and teachers understand data better and identify areas of focus.[51] Norfolk, Virginia also has adopted a district-wide data-driven improvement model that has led to significant improvements in several indicators of student achievement (see box on page 26). Several schools and districts have found considerable success in building a data-driven continuous improvement model by adopting the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence (see box on page 25), a program created by Congress in 1998 and administered by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

State and District Actions

Element 5. Improving Low-Performing Schools Requires Staff to Make Frequent and Appropriate Use of Data to Inform Continuous Improvement

District Actions to Help Schools Make Frequent and Appropriate Use of Data

1. Institutionalize the collection and use of data. Districts can model data-driven decision-making and build structures into school improvement planning that require schools to do the same.

2. Evaluate schools' ability to use data for continuous improvement. Districts can build data-driven continuous improvement strategies into the criteria used to evaluate school performance.

3. Provide fiscal resources and technical assistance to schools that need them. Where school evaluations point out ways in which schools are failing to make effective use of data-driven decision-making strategies, districts can provide technical assistance and resources.

State Actions to Help Schools and Districts Make Frequent and Appropriate Use of Data

1. Model good use of data. States can support the development of data-driven continuous improvement strategies by infusing their own improvement strategies with systems of data-driven decision-making.

2. Provide fiscal resources, guidelines, and technical assistance to schools and districts that need them. Where schools do not receive appropriate support from their district, states may need to help schools, and the districts that serve them, develop systems for data-driven continuous improvement.

3. Require schools to generate certain kinds of data to inform school improvement. Some states require schools to develop improvement plans that include the collection and analysis of school data.

4. Ensure that state programs and policies support district efforts. Where districts are developing data-driven continuous improvement systems, states should ensure that the policies and programs adopted by state policymakers facilitate, rather than impede, work at the local level.

Chapter 3

Building a State Policy Environment to Support School Improvement

Designating a school as low performing is a beginning, not an end, and states have both a constitutional and moral responsibility to ensure that low-performing schools undergo rapid, substantial improvement. Although turning around chronically low-performing schools is a complex task, and institutions that have accomplished this are still exceptions, a growing number of states are finding ways to support wholesale improvements in school quality in low-performing schools and reaping measurable benefits in terms of student achievement.

Without exception, when low-performing schools improve, it is because state and local resources have focused on improving one or more of the elements of effective schooling discussed in Chapter 2. However, these improvements can happen either in spite of or as a result of the state policy environment. In other words, there are several ways that states can build a system to facilitate highly effective school improvement practices at the local level—and there are several ways that states can inadvertently build a system that makes school improvement more difficult.

Developing policies and programs like those suggested in Chapter 2 can go a long way to build capacity for improvement among low-performing schools. At the same time, any attempt at implementing all of the strategies listed in Chapter 2 can quickly deplete state coffers and tax department personnel. Clearly, states need their own set of strategies to ensure that programs are maximally effective, to target resources to areas of greatest need, and to evaluate the extent to which programs and policies have their intended impact at the local level.

Proven strategies and policy elements from states that have supported measurable improvements in low-performing schools around the country can provide a promising blueprint for policymakers in other states committed to universally high-quality public schools. While these successful school improvement systems vary in their details, they share several characteristics that provide important lessons for other policymakers attempting to achieve successful, large-scale school improvement. There are at least six components of successful school improvement systems at the state level: alignment, data-driven decision-making, methods for prioritization, capacity-building activities, consistency, and leveraging of authority.

This chapter discusses each of these six elements and points out the critical roles they play in supporting local school improvement efforts.

State Intervention Systems that Work: North Carolina

As a result of the state's major school accountability legislation, North Carolina has developed a system for working with low-performing schools based on state assistance teams. Each year, the state board of education assigns teams to a small number of the state's poorest-performing schools on a mandatory basis, as well as to other low-performing schools on a voluntary basis. Teams are composed of three to five members, including currently practicing teachers and staff, representatives of higher education, school administrators, and others the state board of education considers appropriate.

According to state law, teams assigned to a school:

- conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of all facets of the school;
- evaluate teachers and administrators;
- collaborate with the school's faculty and staff to revise (as necessary) and assist in implementing the school improvement plan;
- make recommendations for continuous improvement as the plan is implemented;
- review the school's progress; and
- make appropriate reports to the superintendent, local board of education, and state board of education on the school's progress.

The assistance teams have been highly successful not only in helping schools reach their improvement target, but in moving them to exemplary status. However, in cases where schools do not show significant improvement, the law allows the state board of education to intervene in several ways:

- removing principals in low-performing schools on the recommendation of an assistance team;
- appointing an interim superintendent, if more than one-half of the schools in the district are designated as low-performing or if the assistance team makes such a recommendation based on findings that the superintendent has failed to cooperate with the assistance team or otherwise hindered the district's and/or school's ability to improve;
- assigning any of the duties and powers of the local superintendent and finance officer to an interim superintendent, if appropriate; and
- suspending the powers of the local board of education if it determines that the local board failed to cooperate with the interim superintendent or otherwise hindered the district's and/or school's ability to improve student performance.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, online at www.ncpublicschools.org/school_improvement/assistance_index.html.

Key Policy Component #1: Alignment

Over the last two decades, states have mapped out overall accountability systems with varying degrees of alignment among standards, assessments, and curricula to generate change in school performance.[52] The most effective of these systems invest in seamless alignment across policies and programs that focus efforts—at the classroom, school, district, and state levels as well as across different areas of education policy and different state departments and agencies—on improving instruction to meet high standards. They also often align state board and education agency goals and objectives, the content of state and district report cards, and the licensure criteria for teachers and leaders.

One study, for example, examined two states with exceptionally large gains on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1990 to 1996—Texas and North Carolina—and found that they both had undertaken a series of similar reforms that involved aligning standards, assessments,

accountability programs, and, to some extent, teacher and leadership requirements. The study concluded that these aligned reforms are the most plausible cause of the extraordinary gains in student test scores.[53]

Building a state accountability system that generates significant improvements in student achievement also requires state policymakers to align their system with only one goal in mind: improving teaching and learning. States need to maintain a laser-like focus on student achievement and to ensure that this focus is developed and maintained across the system by evaluating multiple variables that impact student learning.[54] In other words, building an accountability system that focuses on student achievement requires states to measure much more than student test scores and focus on evaluating critical systemic elements related to instruction and learning, such as those described in Chapter 2. Building a seamless system that focuses on student achievement also means working across state agencies and with public and private institutions engaged in issues of child health, welfare, and learning as appropriate. The importance of working with organizations outside of schools to support student achievement is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

System alignment is critical in at least two ways:

Without alignment, programs and policies can work at cross-purposes. For example, polices that are designed to *develop* students, *accelerate* the instruction of students who fall behind, and *build capacity* across the system can conflict with policies intended to *sort* students into categories, provide *remedial* instruction to those who fall behind, and *reward* schools that have already achieved exceptionally high standards with more resources. Efforts to reduce class size may compete with efforts to improve teacher quality because the system may need to lower standards to attract more individuals to teach in new classes. And attaching high-stakes consequences to an assessment that is not perfectly aligned to state standards can divert classroom emphasis away from standards to the testing content. Examples such as these make clear that in order to ensure that policies and programs work in tandem toward shared goals, state policies must be aligned.

More fundamentally, if a system has cracks, some schools will always fall through them. The most effective way to ensure that all schools achieve high standards is to create a seamless system that does not provide opportunities for schools to fall through the cracks. Systems that do not ensure that curriculum is aligned with standards and assessments, that do not require teacher preparation programs to deliver candidates with the knowledge and skills needed to bring all students to high standards, or that do not ensure a sufficiently large pool of excellent school leaders leave cracks in the system that make failure an option for many schools. Ensuring that policies and programs have their intended impact at the school level requires policies and programs that are aligned with standards and with each other in a seamless system that focuses on providing all schools with the tools they need to achieve.

Key Policy Component #2:

Data-Driven Decision-Making

If a carefully aligned school improvement system is the vehicle that moves schools toward higher achievement, then data are the fuel. Just as data and information are important at the school level for improving achievement, at the state level effective school improvement systems are infused with data collection and analysis to inform and to improve policy and practice. This data collection and analysis may begin with measures of student achievement, the principal goal of any effective school improvement system. However, building a data system to inform decision-making about school improvement requires

the development of a data system that goes far beyond student test scores. Such a data system:

Monitors student achievement as well as measures of other elements related to student achievement. A system that monitors not only student test scores but also the variables that impact student achievement such as teacher quality, professional development, school leadership, and curriculum can inform decisions about all areas of school improvement. For example, measuring teacher quality, and then developing mechanisms that relate teacher quality measures to student achievement measures, can inform the distribution and content of teacher quality initiatives related to school improvement. Developing an effective evaluation of school leaders that can be a part of the state's licensure process for school leaders, and then examining the distribution of leaders with specific strengths and weaknesses across different types of schools, could provide valuable information to fine-tune leadership preparation and recruitment practices in the state. Cost-benefit analyses and other examinations of fiscal expenditures in specific school improvement areas in relation to actual measures of student achievement can also help ensure that resources focused on school improvement are fiscally worthwhile. Kentucky, for example, has developed nine standards and indicators of school improvement that evaluate a school's curriculum, use of data, instructional practices, school climate, family and community involvement, professional development, leadership capacity, use of resources, and improvement planning procedures. A more complete description of Kentucky's standards and indicators is included in Appendix III.

Makes appropriate use of four kinds of data. As noted in Chapter 2, a powerful system of school improvement that can consistently move low-performing schools upward takes account of the appropriate roles of four different kinds of data: formative, summative, quantitative, and qualitative.

Most existing state accountability systems rely heavily upon summative, quantitative data—in the form of standardized test scores, dropout rates, and attendance rates—to evaluate school and/or district performance. These kinds of data are effective to find low performance, but often they provide scant information about *why* students score as they do, and so they can provide very little information to directly inform school or district intervention strategies. For states, this points out the importance of building a system of support and technical assistance to ensure that districts and schools have the capacity to collect their own formative and qualitative data to diagnose the reasons for poor performance, as well as the ability to translate the findings into workable school improvement programs at the local level. Appendix IV lists several possible areas in which data can be collected to diagnose specific challenges to high achievement at the school level.

At the state level, formative and qualitative data may be particularly useful in evaluating state programs and policies around school improvement. For example, focus groups of administrators and practitioners (usually a qualitative data collection method) can provide valuable feedback to state policymakers concerning a particular policy's effectiveness, the attitudes of school and district staff toward the policy, and possible unintended outcomes of the policy. Convening focus groups throughout the implementation of a policy could provide formative data to states to help adjust the policy "midstream" and make it more useful and effective at the local level.

Disaggregates data. Disaggregating data according to key characteristics of the unit of analysis is a critically important part of data analysis. For example, federal law now requires student achievement data to be disaggregated within schools according to race, language background, and socioeconomic status.

This disaggregation is intended to help schools, districts, and states find specific pockets of low-performing students, even within high-performing schools, so that interventions can be targeted more precisely.

Effective data systems to inform school improvement can also disaggregate data beyond student test scores. For example, states may find powerful information to inform policymaking and resource allocation by disaggregating data concerning teacher and school leader achievement on state licensure exams. Likewise, school achievement data can be disaggregated according to size, location, years of experience of the school leader, average qualifications of teaching staff, particular curriculum used, or other indicators that may inform state improvement strategies.

Collects data continuously. Powerful accountability systems gather data with sufficient frequency to allow for continuous models of improvement and ongoing "early warning" monitoring of schools at risk of becoming low performing. For example, Kansas has developed a model "early warning" monitoring system that makes policymakers aware of schools where performance is moving steadily downward. State policymakers then have the ability to intervene before a school becomes low performing.

Besides these elements of data collection and analysis that are critical to any effective system of school improvement, some states have developed other innovative and informative ways of collecting and analyzing data. For example, Florida and North Carolina have developed statewide data management systems that assign discrete student identification numbers to each student and collect student-level achievement data at the state level according to that number. The system makes it possible

Integrated State Accountability Systems: The Case of Connecticut

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) conducted a study of reading achievement in Connecticut to investigate the programs and policies that explain the state's exceptional performance on NAEP. Connecticut was the top-scoring state on the 1998 fourth-grade NAEP reading assessment and also demonstrated the greatest growth from 1992 to 1998. Moreover, students in poverty and students of color made consistent gains, and white, black, and Hispanic students in Connecticut each performed better than their counterparts in other states.

Although Connecticut's wealth and high levels of parental education may play a part in student achievement, these factors do not account for NAEP improvements between 1992 and 1998. In fact, during those years, the number of Connecticut's citizens living in poverty grew faster than the national average.

Policymakers and educators in the ten highest-performing school districts in the state emphasize the importance of state, district, and classroom practices and policies in increasing reading achievement. They report that establishing clear and fair school improvement goals and accountability mechanisms that correspond with these goals can be a catalyst for continuous improvement. According to policymakers and educators, the state policies and practices that contributed most to improved reading scores included reporting data in timely and usable ways, providing educational and financial assistance to the state's neediest districts, and implementing policies and practices to attract and to support strong teachers and administrators.

Connecticut's use of data-driven decision-making serves as an example of an integrated information and accountability system that informs teaching and learning at the classroom level. NEGP cited the effectiveness of the state's use of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) scores to inform curriculum and instructional practices, the formal reporting of the CMT scores, and the explicitness and practicality of related material (e.g., sample objectives, strategies) provided by the state in conjunction with the test scores. NEGP also found that the state developed a set of effective formative instruments to assess students' reading, writing, and math proficiency, to supplement grade-level tests, and to inform targeted instruction.

Educators reported that the following key policies and practices were particularly useful in improving student achievement:

State Education Policies and Practices

- Providing detailed information on student performance to districts, schools, teachers, parents, and newspapers, while principals use that information to monitor performance and to help improve instruction;
- Providing additional resources to the state's neediest districts; and
- Maintaining an infrastructure that encourages practices that promote quality teaching, such as high salaries, continued professional development, and support and assessment of beginning teachers.

Local District Policies

- Analyzing state results of the state assessment;
- Linking school improvement plans to student reading achievement;
- Providing professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators to learn instructional and assessment strategies in reading;
- Providing professional development on instructional strategies and interventions;
- Securing the support of the local school board;
- Maintaining a strong feeling of ownership and accountability mechanisms in every school; and
- Linking teacher evaluation to student achievement.

Classroom Practices

- Analyzing the results of state tests as well as continuous monitoring of student achievement;
- Increasing the amount of time available for reading instruction, classroom instruction in phonemic awareness, different kinds of reading materials, balanced word attack skills, and comprehension;
- Employing reciprocal reinforcement of reading, writing, and spelling;
- Continually assessing students' progress in reading; and
- Seeking early identification of children with delayed reading skills and pursuing intensive intervention.

Source: Joan B. Baron, *Exploring High and Improving Reading Achievement in Connecticut* (Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel, 1999).

to track student achievement over time even if a student moves across the state. Tennessee has spearheaded the use of "value-added" measures of school performance that assess school performance in terms of student increases on test scores compared to average score increases in reading, language, and mathematics on the state's achievement test.

Key Policy Component #3:

Prioritization and Targeting of Resources

Not only do powerful school improvement systems collect and analyze data to inform continuous improvement strategies, but they use data to prioritize needs. No state can do everything, particularly with recurring budget shortfalls and constantly competing priorities. But establishing shared priorities based on data and comprehensive needs assessments can target resources at all policy levels where they can have the most impact.

Effective prioritization requires states to use data to define needs as well as to evaluate existing resources and infrastructures that can be used to meet needs. School improvement policies and programs that can be built on existing systems are often faster, cheaper, easier to sustain, and more efficient to implement than interventions that are adopted without consideration of existing efforts.

Targeting resources to specific programs in specific grade levels and toward students with specific needs is usually a cost-effective way to improve student achievement. For example, one study has found that in states that have the lowest average measures of socioeconomic status, providing additional resources for primary teachers, expanding pre-kindergarten pro-

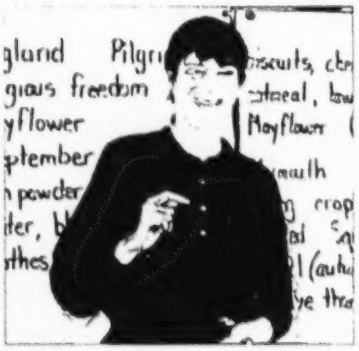
grams, and reducing student:teacher ratios are particularly cost-effective ways to increase student achievement. In fact, states in this study with the lowest socioeconomic indicators could expect their overall scores on NAEP to go up 12 to 15 percent if they spent only $1,000 more per pupil and targeted the funds to these areas.[55]

Once a state uses data to determine critical root causes of low achievement and to target a small number of primary outcomes, it is in a strong position to set measurable goals and to plan policies and programs around school improvement.

Key Policy Component #4:

Planning and Implementing Interventions to Support the Conditions Necessary for Change

Schools that are low performing often find themselves unable to improve because they lack the capacity to make important changes on their own. Likewise, districts vary tremendously in their ability to support school improvement. In cases where neither the school nor the district have the knowledge and resources to lead effective school improvement, states often intervene directly in one or more of several ways. By itself, no one intervention can guarantee improved achievement, but neither is it guaranteed to fail in improving achievement. The key for states is not so much which interventions they provide, but *the extent to which interventions are planned according to the specific needs of the school, as described by high-quality data.*



To some extent, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act now directs how a state designs its state intervention system for low-performing schools (Appendix I describes federal requirements concerning interventions in low-performing schools). The federal law does provide considerable leeway, however, in the kinds of *technical assistance* that states provide for low-performing schools. This is critically important, since targeted, intensive technical assistance is the intervention strategy most likely to bring about long-term improvement in school performance.

Besides providing timely and informative data to schools, then, the other critical state responsibility in school improvement is providing technical assistance when necessary to support positive change at the school or district levels. In states such as North Carolina and Kentucky, where comprehensive state programs of technical assistance to low-performing schools have led to exceptional examples of school improvement, several important elements of the technical assistance program may provide important models for other states to consider. States may wish to:

- Require schools to develop comprehensive school improvement plans that: (1) are based on the requirements of state standards and accountability systems; (2) integrate school mission, goals, and strategies with state requirements; (3) base strategies on specific school needs as defined by qualitative and quantitative data; and (4) define a plan for continuous improvement and refinement of interventions over time.

- Provide long-term, on-site expertise, such as a school improvement team. Twenty-six states currently assign some type of external team to assist low-performing schools.[56] The most effective of these teams are composed of *individuals with specific, successful experience in turning around low-performing schools.* They also work collaboratively with local teachers and administrators and structure the school improvement activities around school-based evidence about the reasons for low achievement. In the long term, the impact of a school improvement team depends on the expertise of the team, the degree of strategic focus, and the length of intervention.

- Provide structured opportunities for teachers, principals, parents, and other staff to visit higher-performing schools with strong instructional programs.[57]

- Involve school staff as well as representatives from stakeholder

groups, such as parents, in the process of school improvement.

- Protect low-performing schools from "program-itis," the tendency to change instructional programs frequently in search of the "silver bullet" to improve student achievement.

- Where appropriate, work with the district to ensure that district support and technical assistance is integrated with the services and expectations of state officials.

Key Policy Component #5:

Taking the Long View on School Improvement

Change rarely happens overnight, and school improvement is no exception. In fact, improving schools that are chronically low performing may require years of systematic capacity-building efforts. In Milwaukee, for example, principals reported that real improvements in student achievement that took hold as a result of structured school improvement efforts didn't emerge for two to four years after the start of reform.[58] Long-term institutional improvement also often occurs in short-term jolts and stages. Consequently, investing in long-term school improvement may require patience among policymakers, administrators, and the general public as schools take "three steps forward and one step back" over the course of several years.

In other words, school improvement requires commitment at all levels and stages of the process to stay the course despite setbacks. At the school and district levels, this means developing a long-range improvement plan based on clear goals and a guiding vision. From year to year, schools and districts may evaluate and fine-tune individual strategies for improvement, but the overarching goals and vision need to remain a constant target over time. In Milwaukee, schools that develop an annual educational plan based on long-term goals with short-term improvement strategies keep to the plan from year to year and use the plan to focus school committee work, while specific action plans show improvement over time.[59] At the state level, this may mean allowing a school to invest in its data-driven improvement strategies for two or more years before expecting to see real gains in student achievement.

The No Child Left Behind Act prescribes a particularly rapid timeline for school improvement intervention strategies. Although states must adhere to this timeline for all Title I schools that are designated as low performing, the federal law says little about the kind and quality of technical assistance that states should provide to schools as they progress through the graded system of sanctions that is required. It is important for states to seize upon the flexibility they have in terms of technical assistance and to provide long-term investments for steady, long-term capacity building, rather than "quick fixes" that may lead to little more than temporary increases in student scores. Adopting a capacity-building model of technical assistance and asking schools to stick to it may require states to help schools and districts resist the temptation to find a "quick fix" instead of a long-term solution.

Key Policy Component #6:

Leveraging of Authority

States with powerful school improvement systems also know how to use that power to leverage their authority to drive the system quality upward in other areas. States have not always used the authority they have to the best advantage of students; for example, the Study Group found that most state boards of education have authority over teacher licensure criteria and program approval, yet many states continue to approve inadequate teacher preparation programs and require new teachers to pass licensure tests that have little correlation with measures of effective teaching. States with the authority to impact the content and quality of teacher preparation could leverage that authority to insist on a new breed of teacher. This holds true for school leaders as well, who are often under-prepared and overwhelmed when they first enter leadership positions.

Many states are thinking of ways to leverage their authority over teachers and administrators in ways that relate directly to school improvement. But there remains work to be done in several areas:

- Aligning teacher licensure requirements with what is known about the characteristics of effective teachers and components of effective instruction;
- Reconfiguring teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers to teach in low-performing schools and to adopt the components of effective schools listed in this report;
- Restructuring administrator preparation programs to create a pool of inspired and prepared individuals for leadership positions in low-performing schools;
- Revisiting administrator licensure requirements to ensure that they reflect what is known about effective leadership;
- Producing accreditation criteria that encourage schools to undertake continuous improvement and that help build capacity among all schools for data-driven reform; and
- Aligning policies and programs in the state education agency with those in welfare, health, early childhood education, and higher education, as well as with the systems of foster care and juvenile justice.

Conclusion

Clearly, states cannot do all of the work when it comes to school improvement. Ultimately, it is at the school level where the ability and the will to improve need to take root. However, states can play a critical role in establishing a policy environment that facilitates, rather than hinders, the development of local will and ability. States need to focus on creating the conditions under which schools are most likely to succeed, and districts are most likely to be able to help them. In those cases where schools still do not achieve what is expected of them, states have the authority and the responsibility to intervene.

Alternative Schools and High Academic Standards

Alternative schools are a growing category of schools that serve students who have not succeeded in their neighborhood school - often students who are disabled, at high risk for behavioral or educational failure, pregnant or parenting, wards of the court, expelled students or students under another disciplinary sanction, or returning school dropouts. Because alternative education programs serve exceptional concentrations of high-risk students, states have grappled with finding fair and appropriate ways to hold alternative schools accountable for student achievement.

In many cases, alternative education programs often remain outside the traditional K-12 education system, and as a result, they have been marginalized in the movement toward high academic standards. As a matter of fact, despite the growing importance of alternative schools in providing educational options for students unable to thrive in traditional educational settings, there is scant information about their number, their quality, or precisely the kinds of students they serve. Some states are just beginning to gather information on alternative schools and

students, and the information suggests that the number of students in alternative schools may be high. For example, in Oregon alone, a recent survey found 868 alternative education programs were serving about 18,000 students.

The NASBE Study Group on Low-Performing Schools strongly believes that the nation's commitment to "leave no child behind" requires swift and strong action on the part of policymakers to become familiar with alternative schools in their state and then to develop systems to ensure students in alternative schools receive appropriate support and resources to meet high standards. Accomplishing this task is a challenge for several reasons:

- **Testing**. State systems of accountability need to test students in alternative schools in ways that are rigorous but sufficiently flexible to take account of the varying needs of some students.

- **Dropout Rates**. Because of their student population with exceptionally high risk factors that correlate with a high likelihood of dropout (such as pregnancy), alternative schools may have higher-than-average dropout rates. Ideally, accountability should be based on multiple measures of success.

- **Teacher Development**. Teachers in alternative schools are often not licensed, and they may have had few opportunities to learn about standards and accountability requirements. States may need to provide tailored professional development to help teachers in alternative schools implement standards for their students.

- **Funding**. Alternative schools often receive a significant portion of their operating funds from grants, charitable contributions, and fees. These sources of funding may not be stable, which makes long-term planning for school improvement particularly challenging for alternative schools. Implementing high standards for students in alternative schools may require states to consider ways to provide stable, sufficient resources to help alternative schools meet challenging state standards.

There are several actions that states should consider:

- **Track patterns of exclusions**. This includes tracking suspensions, expulsions, attendance rates, graduation rates, and number of students enrolled in alternative educational settings. It is particularly critical for states to analyze exclusion patterns to ensure that state accountability systems are not inadvertently encouraging schools and districts to push students into alternative settings.

- **Work with other agencies to increase the quality of alternative settings**. State education policymakers should collaborate with agencies that oversee many alternative education programs to ensure that these programs are aligned with state and district K-12 policies, that they receive appropriate professional development in curriculum and instruction related to state standards and accountability measures, and that they provide accelerated, rather than remedial, instruction for students.

- **Ensure alternative educational programs are included in school improvement efforts**. Alternative schools must be included in some way in state accountability and school improvement efforts. California has developed a comprehensive alternative school accountability model that officials believe balances the competing needs of validity, reliability, feasibility, accuracy, reasonableness, cost, flexibility, and stability. The model evaluates alternative schools according to several criteria, including scores on California's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessment and at least two of fifteen other indicators. School progress is measured by comparing the school to its own performance over time, rather than to the performance of other schools. More information on California's system can be found at http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa/asam/. More information about alternative schools is available in the National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices report, *Setting High Standards in Alternative Education* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2001).

Chapter 4

Building a Community Environment to Support School Improvement

Education policymakers and practitioners have a professional and moral responsibility to ensure the highest standards of teaching and learning in public schools, and this needs to be the primary focus of school improvement efforts. Fortunately, in many cases educators need not work in isolation to accomplish their goals. On the contrary, there is compelling evidence that under many circumstances schools can accomplish elements of their school improvement plans more effectively by inviting families, communities, and other social service agencies to join in working toward common goals. Bringing in these groups to collaborate on school improvement can also generate powerful models of collaboration that build shared accountability for student success.

While improving curriculum and instruction is a critically necessary component of achieving high standards, many schools and students can benefit from a broader improvement effort. As we have seen, many of the nation's lowest-performing schools are located in severely disadvantaged communities, with all the attendant problems frequently encountered by economically disadvantaged areas.[60] Neighborhoods in poverty are also likely to have low levels of collective efficacy (meaning mutual trust and shared willingness to work for a "common good"), to have weaker community organizations, and to be less able to secure additional resources to invest in social stability and community resource development.[61] In addition to these community measures that challenge many low-performing schools, the Center for Demographic Policy believes, for example, that as many as 40 percent of children in school fail to achieve to their full potential at least in part because of challenges related to learning, behavior, or emotional development.[62]

At the same time, most high-performing, high-poverty schools seize upon parents and communities as critical partners in high achievement. These schools know that most communities—including high-poverty communities—have public and private resources in the form of parents, preschools, community groups, businesses, and social service agencies that can help enable learning among students and support school improvement goals. High student achievement may be the ultimate responsibility of the education system, but addressing barriers to learning and supporting the best interest of children can be the goal of an entire community. Even better, initiatives to involve parents, preschools, businesses, and social service agencies in school improvement efforts that are well-implemented and that focus on enabling learning can lead to even higher student achievement.[63]

This chapter looks at how four specific kinds of community support—parent involvement, high-

quality preschool, business partnerships, and integrated social services—can assist educators in improving low-performing schools and can build an environment of shared accountability for student success.

Parent Involvement Can Increase Student Achievement

When families are involved in children's education, good things happen. From preschool to higher education, parents can help increase student achievement, improve student attitudes and attendance, decrease student discipline problems, and increase student aspirations.[64] For example, a study of one school–family–community partnership in Baltimore found that the quality of the school's partnership program significantly improved attendance as well as student performance on reading and writing tests in the third grade.[65]

Parent involvement can take many forms, and different types of parent involvement can lead to different outcomes. For example, in high schools, parent involvement that includes repeated visits to school and strict rule-setting at home about homework time and free-time activities actually correlates with lower student achievement. Parents of high schoolers who engage in goal-setting with students, however, correlate with high achievement. Programs that help parents extend learning activities in the home improve elementary achievement test results and decrease absenteeism. Schools included in the Education Trust's *Dispelling the Myth* study involved parents in curricular decisions and helped parents learn to review students' work.

In many low-income and minority neighborhoods, successful parent involvement programs take on specific

State and District Actions

Supporting Parent Involvement in Schools

District Actions to Support Effective Parent Involvement Programs

1. Ensure that school personnel develop cultural competency to help support meaningful parent and community involvement. In Philadelphia, for example, principals who have demonstrated success in building parent and community engagement programs tutor new administrators in cultural competency and other elements of effective parent engagement.

2. Arrange for schools that are trying to establish effective parent involvement programs to visit schools that already have them. Sometimes schools learn most effectively by seeing good ideas in operation at other schools.

3. Make measures of parent involvement a part of the school accountability system.

4. Provide technical assistance to school leaders in the area of parent involvement. For schools that find it difficult to establish effective parent involvement, districts can provide technical assistance in setting up a program, evaluating its effectiveness, and undertaking continuous program improvement.

State Actions to Support Effective Parent Involvement Programs

1. Include parent involvement strategies and the importance of parent involvement in teacher and leadership preparation programs. Standards for teachers and school leaders should include knowledge about the importance of parent involvement, knowledge of effective strategies, and skills of cultural competency.

2. Forge partnerships with state-level parent organizations.

3. Provide information to schools and districts about promising practices. In cases where neither schools nor their districts have the capacity to establish effective parent involvement programs, states can assist by providing proven models and promising practices.

4. Ensure that staff members at the state education agency support parent involvement and build into state mission statements and goals the idea of parents as a resource. States need to ensure that the value of parent involvement is reflected in the work of the state education agency, as well as in the strategic planning, goals, and missions adopted by state administrators and policymakers.

characteristics that balance power relationships between parents and education professionals. Often this takes the form of organized parent

groups that together generate the social capital and political will to move parents to the center of school improvement. Other organized community groups, such as those formed around issues of public safety and housing, can also bring important resources to bear on school improvement. Schools themselves need to ensure that all staff develop the cultural competency necessary to work effectively with local parent and community groups.

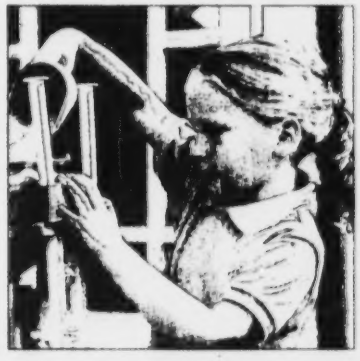
Parents may also be members of other local community groups that organize around education and impact local education reform. For example, the Center for Community Change (CCC) estimates that there are at least 125 community-organizing initiatives around education located across the country. In the most promising of these efforts, a wide variety of groups interested in school improvement have come together to address state, district, and school policies and their impact on student achievement. In addition, community-organizing initiatives can be effective partners in addressing conditions that help perpetuate low performance, since they often include the involvement of community groups interested in issues such as housing, safety, job creation, literacy, and other community issues.

It is important for policymakers to understand the powerful influence parents and other community organizations can have on student performance in school. Even more critically, state policymakers and administrators can help low-performing schools choose parent involvement activities that support their particular school improvement goals and that align with their educational plan. Providing expertise to low-performing schools and districts as they think about effective ways to involve parents in reaching school improvement goals can be a critical component in turning around many low-performing schools.

High-Quality Preschool Impacts Student Achievement

An impressive body of research makes clear the strong link between a child's early learning environment and later school success. High-quality preschool programs can accelerate intellectual development and reduce student behavior and discipline problems, especially among children who live in high-poverty communities. Many elementary schools and districts see to it that children at risk of school failure in elementary and secondary school

receive high-quality early intervention in the form of preschool education. Still, children living in poverty are only about half as likely as children from high-income families to attend preschool.[66] Because there is such a strong relationship between poverty and low-performing schools, states and districts may be able to substantially impact achievement in low-performing schools by establishing high-quality preschool and making it available to all children at risk of school failure.



The Perry Preschool project in Ypsilanti, Michigan, the Child–Parent Center program in Chicago, Illinois, and North Carolina's Smart Start program all illustrate the potential for preschool programs to impact the chances of success for students from high-poverty communities.

High/Scope Perry Preschool was a project in Ypsilanti, Michigan in the 1960s. The program served low-income African American children who were at risk of failing in school because of environmental factors and low measures on IQ tests. The High/Scope Perry Preschool project is a particularly important source of information about the impact of high-quality preschool because researchers have tracked 95 percent of program participants until age 27. The results are striking. Not only did 71 percent of participants finish high school (compared to only 54 percent of a

control group), but other outcomes were equally impressive:[67]

- Twelve percent of men from High/Scope had five or more arrests by age 27, compared to half of the control group.
- Fifty-two percent of men from High/Scope received social services at some point between the ages of 18 and 27, compared to 77 percent of men in a control group.
- Fifty-two percent of men who participated in High/Scope owned their own home by age 27, compared to 21 percent of a control group.
- Eight percent of women who participated in High/Scope participated in special education, compared to 37 percent of a control group.
- By age 27, 57 percent of women from High/Scope had at least one out-of-wedlock birth, compared to 83 percent of women in the control group.
- Forty percent of women from High/Scope were married at age 27, compared to 8 percent of the control group.

Researchers suggest that although the High/Scope Perry Preschool project was expensive ($12,356 per child in 1992 dollars), each participant in the program saved the public system, on average, more than $88,000 on future welfare, judicial, special education, and crime expenses, as well as increased taxes on participant's earnings.

State and District Actions

Supporting High-Quality Preschool

District Actions to Support High-Quality Preschool

1. Provide the necessary funding.

2. Ensure appropriate distribution of programs. Work with local preschool providers to ensure that high-quality preschools are located in the communities that need them most.

3. Support the adoption of a high-quality curriculum. Districts can work with local early childhood providers and the agencies that oversee local early childhood education to adopt a high-quality curriculum that corresponds with the needs of children when they enter kindergarten.

State Actions to Support High-Quality Preschool

1. Set standards for preschool curriculum that align with expectations of K-12 standards. Building preschool programs into an integrated system of school improvement requires setting standards for the appropriate knowledge and skills students should develop during a preschool program and evaluating programs according to the standards.

2. Set standards for preschool teachers and evaluate teachers according to these standards.

3. Provide funding for the establishment of high-quality preschool. High-quality preschool education saves states thousands of dollars in later social services such as welfare and incarceration. Recognizing the degree to which high-quality preschool benefits state budgets in the long term, states may consider funding preschool education for students and districts that need it most.

4. Work closely with the state agency responsible for preschool education or encourage the development of an overarching state office to oversee state efforts in preschool education. The state education agency needs to work closely with the agency that oversees preschool education to ensure that preschool standards and curriculum are linked to the expectations of students in the early years of K-12 schooling. Also, state education agencies can encourage agencies overseeing preschool teacher preparation to include in preparation programs information about the types of readiness that students should possess when they enter kindergarten. In states such as Kansas and Connecticut, a state office has been developed to oversee preschool quality and distribution.

5. Highlight examples of promising practices in early childhood education. Some schools and districts fail to establish high-quality preschools because they have little knowledge about how to do so most effectively.

Chicago's Child–Parent Center program (CPC) also demonstrates the power of high-quality preschool to impact student achievement. Over its 35 years, the CPC program has served about 100,000 poor urban families. The program provides preschool, kindergarten and early elementary supplementary services. Parents are required to work with the program for one half-day each week. Compared to a control group of students who did not attend the program, CPC participants were more likely to graduate, less likely to be arrested as a juvenile, less likely to be arrested for a violent crime, less likely to be retained in school, and less likely to need special education services. In 1996 dollars, the average annual cost of the half-day preschool program was $4,350, while the primary supplemental program cost $1,500.[68]

North Carolina's Smart Start program demonstrates that more decentralized approaches to support high-quality preschool may also positively impact student performance. North Carolina's Early Childhood Initiative, Smart Start, was established in 1993 as a partnership among local leaders, state government, service providers, and families. The program funds child and family services in every county in the state with a primary goal to increase children's preparedness for school. In 2000-01, the state allocated $250 million in block grants to county partnerships that oversee the administration of services in child care, health, and family support.

Because Smart Start comprises hundreds of different programs across the state instead of one specific intervention model, evaluating the effectiveness of Smart Start has been a challenge. Nevertheless, a research team from the University of North Carolina has been evaluating Smart Start since its inception and has found very encouraging outcomes. Not only are growing numbers of child care providers participating in quality enhancement activities sponsored by Smart Start partnerships, but on-site visits of over 180 child care centers confirmed that the quality of child care has significantly improved. Furthermore, the quality of child care was directly related to the number of quality improvement activities undertaken by the child care center, as well as the percentage of funds allocated by the local partnership to child care improvement. A study comparing the school readiness of students who attended child care centers that had participated in Smart Start improvement activities to students who had attended child care centers that had not participated found that Smart Start children entered school with higher scores on vocabulary tests and more positive teacher evaluations of their readiness for school.[69]

The results of these and similar studies of high-quality preschool make the case for the impact of high-quality preschool on student achievement and the role of preschool in improving student achievement at low-performing schools. The challenge for states in terms of low-performing schools is to help schools and districts analyze their own need for high-quality preschools and to develop preschool opportunities that align with K-12 school improvement goals.

Business Partnerships Can Contribute to Student Learning

Since the 1980s, school–business partnerships have become increasingly important sources of support for school improvement. From the early to late 1980s alone, the number of business–education partnerships increased from 42,200 to over 140,000.[70] As they expanded in number, these partnerships also expanded in dimension, from simple one-to-one agreements to complex multiagency collaborative arrangements.

Business partnerships with schools can be effective mechanisms to help ease some budget constraints faced in low-performing schools, to provide high-quality volunteers during the school day, and to encourage businesses to participate in school improvements that prepare students for entry to the workforce. Unlike the "adopt-a-school" model that focuses resources only on the most disadvantaged students in urban areas, business partnerships are often found in rural as well as urban schools and districts, focus on improving the overall education system, are designed to meet goals established by both the school and the business, and may play a role in community development as well as school improvement.[71]

The National Alliance of Business suggests that effective school–business partnerships can be formed at the state and local levels to benefit both schools and the business community in several areas of collaboration: policy, systemic educational improvement, management, professional development, the classroom, and special services. From the perspective of participating schools, business partnerships often are effective ways to improve teaching and learning, develop and expand vocational and technical education programs, establish student apprenticeships, and provide work experience to students.

States can play an important role in fostering school business partnerships that support student learning in low-performing schools by:

- Drawing upon the expertise of state and federal school-to-work initiatives that have been linking schools and businesses for the

mutual benefit of each and, most importantly, for the academic enrichment of students.

- Developing mechanisms to ensure that low-performing schools, rather than only high-performing schools, have adequate opportunities to form productive partnerships with businesses.
- Developing structured relationships with state business groups to educate them about the needs of low-performing schools and to generate a shared responsibility for student success.
- Distributing models to schools, districts, and businesses of specific, highly structured programs that work and providing clear indications about why the programs work that relate to school environment, school needs, school goals, and measurable improvements in student outcomes.
- Communicating to schools and districts the importance of placing school improvement goals and student achievement at the center of any negotiation concerning a school–business partnership.
- Using state-level relationships among policymakers and business groups to link low-performing schools with local businesses that may have resources to contribute to school improvement.
- Requiring schools and districts, as part of the school improvement process, to consider ways in which local and national businesses might be able to help achieve school improvement goals.

The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education

Founded in 1992, the Maryland Business Roundtable for Education (MBRT) is a coalition of more than 100 leading employers that have made a long-term commitment to improve student achievement in Maryland.

MBRT works with practitioners and policymakers to achieve measurable improvement in schools and student achievement through high standards, rigorous assessments, and strong accountability. More than 1,000 volunteers from participating businesses work with MBRT to ensure that Maryland students achieve. These partners join together to:

- Support and preserve key components of school reform through leadership changes in the legislature, the executive office, and on the state board of education.
- Push for rigorous standards and assessments that will be linked to receipt of a high school diploma.
- Develop and monitor the Maryland Plan for Technology in Education, which has increased student and teacher access to technology as well as its effective use.
- Create a "decision-support system" website, in collaboration with the Maryland State Department of Education, on which schools (and others) can access and analyze test data, compare performance across schools, and identify effective practices.
- Create a state Professional Development Plan (www.mbrt.org/d-professi.htm) for educators.
- Develop a model for school business partnerships (www.mbrt.org/achievein.htm) and a guidebook for business leaders and school principals.
- Lead *Achievement Counts* (www.mbrt.org/achievem.htm), a campaign to demonstrate to students the connection between achievement in school and success in the workplace.

State and District Actions

Supporting the Development of School–Business Partnerships

District Actions to Support Business Partnerships with Low-Performing Schools

1. Develop district-wide relationships with businesses.

2. Ensure that low-performing schools have at least as much, and preferably more, access to business partnerships than average or high-performing schools. In general, higher-performing schools find it easier to establish relationships with local businesses because they are often located in areas with more businesses, and businesses see high-performing schools as excellent sources of motivated students.

3. Involve leadership at high levels in fostering business partnerships. Involving the superintendent and/or chair of the state board of education in fostering business partnerships sends a strong message about the value of collaboration.

4. Provide professional development for teachers and other staff. At times, teachers and school leaders fail to take advantage of business partnership opportunities because they lack the knowledge and expertise needed to do so. In such a case, districts can step in to ensure that the school has the expertise to build upon the partnership across the curriculum.

5. Involve businesses in the early years of education, preferably by at least the eighth grade. School-to-work programs and other kinds of business partnerships that involve students in the latter half of high school are generally "too little too late" when it comes to impacting student career goals and building an academic program to help students achieve the goals they set.

6. Set evaluation criteria for partnerships that ensure business partnerships benefit students. Schools that engage in business partnerships should be able to evaluate these partnerships in relation to a set of criteria that measure the impact of the partnerships on student achievement. Districts can help schools by establishing criteria and including evaluation of business partnerships as a part of school accountability and strategic planning.

State Actions to Support Business Partnerships with Low-Performing Schools

1. Form statewide linkages with business groups, school-to-work agencies, and others interested in school–business partnerships. For example, in Ohio the Building Excellent Schools for Today (BEST) coalition includes the business community, the state board of education, the state superintendent, higher education, teachers, principals, district superintendents, school board members, religious and civic groups, parents, students, and social service agencies in efforts to achieve common goals in school improvement.

2. Distribute information on promising practices from effective school-to-work initiatives and other business partnerships. States can also support visits between schools engaged in business partnerships and schools hoping to become engaged.

3. Ensure equitable distribution of opportunities to partner with businesses. Low-performing schools stand to benefit from business partnerships but often find them hard to develop. States can initiate programs to educate businesses about the importance of partnering with schools in need of improvement and can provide technical assistance to schools as needed to set up academic programs around the partnerships.

4. Involve high-level leadership. When senior leaders at the state level become involved in building and supporting business partnerships with schools in need of improvement, it sends a message to schools and business leaders that the issue is of critical importance.

5. Encourage cross-department collaboration. State education agencies can work with other state agencies, such as welfare and vocational education, to support school–business partnerships.

6. Work with the state's higher education system to articulate the standards and goals of business partnerships. High-quality school–business partnerships help prepare students for high-level skilled jobs that often require a higher education degree for entry. Consequently, states should work with their higher education system to develop joint goals and standards for the outcomes of school–business partnerships.

- Providing training and technical assistance to staff in low-performing schools on questions to ask and data to gather before undertaking a business partnership.

- Encouraging school business partnerships to be evaluated and to demonstrate measurable improvements in student outcomes related to school improvement goals.

The Positive Role of Integrated Community and Social Services

Integrated services refers to a coordinated system to deliver education, health, and social services for the purpose of streamlining and integrating the delivery of all services to children and families and making a variety of services easier to access at one central location. Individual programs provide a range of different services and can go by a variety of other names, including school-linked services, community schools, community service center, family resource center, full-service schools, school-based youth services, integrated delivery services, or community centers.[72]

Integrated service programs usually link child and family health and social services through schools and provide a range of services that are particularly suited to address the interrelated challenges faced by at-risk students. Done well, integrated services programs may focus on a variety of child indicators of well-being that can impact academic achievement—including drug abuse counseling, gang-diversion programs, health care, teen pregnancy counseling, job training and counseling, tutoring and remedial education, mentoring, dropout prevention, after-school care, parent education, mental health services, child abuse programs, recreation, programs to reduce intergroup tensions, and programs for homeless youth[73]—and overcome barriers to school readiness. Even better, available data suggests that integrated services can be both cost effective and successful.[74] California's Healthy Start program, for example, has been credited with improving test scores for the lowest-performing schools.

The arguments in favor of integrated services have been summarized by Ismat Abdal-Haqq:[75]

- All components of a student's well-being impact his or her academic success.[76]

- Growing numbers of children can be considered at-risk for academic failure and other types of social problems.[77]

What to Ask When Planning Integrated Services

- What results are desired from integrated services?
- Do services include school-readiness activities, such as immunizations, vision and hearing testing, or developmental evaluations?
- Will education be offered to parents?
- Will health services be provided?
- Is there a family-community support component?
- Will there be support from local human services agencies?
- How should services be delivered?
- Which agencies and organizations should be involved in planning and/or implementing the services?
- Who should be targeted for services?
- How will the results be evaluated?
- Who will evaluate the program?

Source: National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), *Integrated Services: A Component of Comprehensive School Health Programs* (Chicago, IL: National PTA, 1996).

Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers

The Kentucky Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs) were established in 1990 to enhance students' ability to succeed in school by finding solutions to non-academic circumstances that interfere with learning. In order to apply for a state grant to establish a center, schools must have at least 20 percent of their student population eligible for free or reduced lunch. Funds range from $33,000 to $90,000, depending on the number of students eligible for the free-lunch program. Once funds are granted, each center establishes its own Advisory Council, at least one-third of whose members must be parents, to design and deliver services. Although each center develops unique programs and services, several core components exist at every center:

Family Resource Centers serve children from birth to age twelve and focus on the following components:

- Preschool child care for two- and three-year-olds;
- After-school care;
- "Families in training" support for new and expectant parents;
- Parent and child education and family literacy programs;
- Support and training for child care providers; and
- Health services and health service referrals.

Youth Services Centers serve children over twelve years old and focus on the following components:

- Referrals to health and social services;
- Employment counseling, placement, and training;
- Part-time job development, including summer jobs;
- Substance abuse counseling; and
- Family crisis and mental health services.

In response to local needs, FRYSCs also offer services such as clothing assistance, food assistance, school supply provision, transportation assistance, and tutoring.

In 1999, Kentucky's Cabinet for Families and Children, the Kentucky Department of Education, and the Kentucky Office of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers formed a partnership with Communities in Schools (CIS). CIS provides resources, services, business partners, parents, and other volunteers for schools. In the same year, the Office of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers also expanded the program by partnering with the Kentucky Office of Aging Services to develop the Kentucky KinCare Program, a support program for grandparents raising grandchildren.

Currently, 774 centers (393 Family Resource Centers, 231 Youth Services Centers, and 150 combined centers) are located across the state. These centers serve 1,145 schools, or over 98 percent of eligible public schools in Kentucky. Anyone residing in the area served by the school, even individuals with no children attending the school, may receive assistance from the center.

Kentucky contracted with an outside evaluator to study the impact of FRYSC. The study found that teachers believed that students served by the centers improved the completion rate of their homework and classwork and became better at obeying school rules, interacting with peers, and cooperating with other students and staff. The evaluators also found overwhelming support for FRYSCs among school staff and community members.

For more information, see the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report, *Helping Families to Help Students: Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Services Centers* (Atlanta, GA: SREB, 2001), or contact the Office of Family Resource and Youth Services Centers, Cabinet for Families and Children, at 275 East Main Street, Frankfort, KY 40621 or online at cfc.state.ky.us/frysc.

- In the long run, preventing failure is more cost effective than correction or remediation.[78]
- At-risk children often come to school with challenges that cut across conventional health, social, and education systems boundaries.[79]
- The current system of service delivery to children and youth is fragmented, which can lead to duplication, waste, and lack of coordination among service providers. This fragmentation increases the chances that some children will fall through the cracks, both academically and in terms of mental and physical health.[80]
- Because schools have the most sustained and long-term contact with children of any social service, they are the logical institution for linking services to children.[81]

Despite their promise, integrated services may not be appropriate for some low-performing schools, particularly those that serve students from a wide or diffused geographic area, that have teachers who are reluctant to support an integrated services model, or that do not have the trust of local residents. The development of integrated services may also be hindered by state and federal regulations that do not allow service providers from different agencies to share information about students and families. Finally, schools that enter into integrated service agreements may find it harder than expected to truly integrate services, as opposed to operating separate services side-by-side within the school. Social services have traditionally been segregated from academic programs in schools. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services points out that "in some schools, a student identified as at risk for grade retention, dropout, and substance abuse may be assigned to three counseling programs operating independently of each other. Such fragmentation not only is costly, it works against good results."[82] In some schools, building new organizational patterns to foster integration can be a classic endeavor to swim against a very strong tide.

In deciding whether integrated services may be an appropriate intervention strategy for a low-performing school, education leaders need to consider several issues:

- Alignment of integrated services goals with school goals and standards;
- Receptiveness of school staff and staff of other service agencies;
- Impact on student achievement;
- Impact on other facets of school improvement, such as parent involvement;
- State barriers to sharing data;
- Impact on academic programs;
- What services are to be offered; and
- Indirect, rather than direct results (for example, New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services Program [SBYSP] found improvements in educational aspirations and credits earned among participants, rather than direct achievement gains).[83]

State and District Actions

Supporting the Development of Integrated Community and Social Services

District Actions to Support Integrated Community and Social Services

1. Work with community and social service agencies at the district level to encourage collaboration. Integration can be a district, as well as a school, responsibility, and interagency agreements are often negotiated at the district level.

2. Review policies to ensure they facilitate, rather than impede, the provision of integrated services. Some district policies may inadvertently make it difficult for schools to integrate with community and social services. For example, some districts adopt policies on building usage that can impede outside groups from using school facilities to provide services to children.

3. Evaluate schools in part according to the extent to which they integrate community and social services into the school. Building elements of integrated service provision into the school evaluation system and improvement planning can encourage schools to develop systems to foster integration.

State Actions to Support Integrated Community and Social Services

1. Review policies to ensure they support rather than impede promising practices. State education policymakers may have inadvertently adopted policies and regulations that make integrating services at the local level more difficult rather than less. For example, some confidentiality agreements may make it hard for children's agencies and schools to share records.

2. Fund integrated service centers in targeted areas.

3. Minimize inter-departmental barriers at the state level. Breaking down barriers among agencies at the state level and forming joint programs, shared funding streams, and coordinated goals and objectives can not only make the state systems more efficient and effective but can foster the same kind of collaboration in local communities.

Chapter 5
Money Matters

Financing school improvement has been a contentious issue for years. Despite decades of compensatory programs intended to equalize resources among schools that serve wealthy and poor students, educational spending is still strikingly unequal. Wealthy school districts spend, on average, 56 percent more per student than poor school districts, and many other states across the country have faced litigation because of the unequal provision of financial resources to schools.[84] A number of these states are under court order to rework their school finance formulas to allocate more resources to poorer schools.

Early efforts to improve chronically low-performing schools in the 1960s and '70s focused primarily on increasing spending for compensatory programs aimed at ameliorating the effects of culture or poverty on student achievement. Many of these spending programs continue to exist, but they have been challenged by critics who believe that increases in targeted educational spending over the last few decades have done little to improve school quality. These individuals point to relatively flat measures of student achievement on NAEP over the same time period, and conclude that increasing money has not improved student achievement.[85] These analyses have gained media and public attention and have been used to advocate legislative and policy moves that see standards and accountability, rather than more money, as the answer to low-performance in schools. Other researchers calculate student expenditures over the last thirty years differently and argue that increases in education spending outside of special education have been small, and, even with small increases in spending, money *does* improve student achievement.

The truth seems to lie in the middle. Spending on education has increased considerably over the last few decades, but this was spent largely on compensatory programs that focus on minority and low-income students or on programs that seem to show disproportionate effects for low-income and minority students, like reducing class size. Because of the specific spending patterns that have targeted additional money to low-income children, gains in student achievement as a result of spending should be apparent among low-income students who are the largest recipients of compensatory funds. Indeed, over the time in which compensatory spending has increased dramatically, NAEP scores have increased only slightly overall. However, black students gained from .3 to .8 of a standard deviation, depending upon the subject being tested. Low-scoring white students and Hispanic students also showed considerable gains from the early '70s to 1992. White students who were not disadvantaged, those students who had the fewest dollars

targeted toward their achievement, stayed flat or showed only minor gains during the same time period. Further analysis showed that changes in family characteristics could not explain most of the gains among minority students.[86]

Clearly, resources *do* matter, and increasing expenditures in public education can impact student achievement in significant ways, particularly for students from poor families and minority students, but only when the money is carefully targeted to programs that benefit students at greatest risk of failure.[87]

Targeting funds to programs most likely to benefit schools serving students at risk of failure presents a set of unique challenges to states and has met with mixed success. Some critics of school finance reform point out that in reality low-performing schools and districts have very limited capacity to ensure that money is spent on effective interventions to improve student learning. They argue that schools and districts should have to "turn over a new leaf" *before* receiving extra funds. Other critics suggest that a portion of school improvement funds should go to reward schools that are high performing rather than to support schools that perform poorly.

The Study Group understands that mismanaged schools and districts can certainly mismanage more money. But managed properly, money is a powerful tool to address some challenges facing low-performing schools. For example, there really is no replacement for money when low-performing schools try to afford:

- competitive salaries for teachers and school leaders,
- extensive, high-quality professional development for teachers and school leaders,
- high-quality laboratory equipment and technology systems,
- high-quality, up-to-date library books,
- well-supplied clubs and extracurricular activities,
- safe buildings, and
- reduced class size.

Furthermore, while targeting funds to compensatory programs has led to mixed results in terms of school improvement in the past, a critical missing factor has been the use of data to evaluate and fine-tune programs to ensure their success. In other words, interventions in schools serving students at risk of failure have been measured too often according to the amount of money spent on school improvement and too little on the outcomes related to those expenditures.

Without question, *all* students in the nation should have as their birthright schools with high-quality teachers and leadership, high-quality laboratory equipment and technology systems, well-supplied student activities, safe buildings, adequate library resources, and appropriately sized classes. Exactly how this is to become a reality continues to be a matter of considerable debate, and courts across the country have interpreted their state constitutions

The Way Money Is Directed Matters

Grissmer and others compared Texas NAEP scores to California's scores and found that scores for students from similar family backgrounds differed significantly, with students in California scoring about 12 percent lower than students with similar family backgrounds in Texas. What makes the difference? The researchers found that about two-thirds of the difference could be explained statistically by three things: lower student:teacher ratios in Texas, a much greater percentage of students attending public pre-kindergarten in Texas, and a larger percentage of teachers in Texas reporting that they have the resources they need to teach.

Source: David Grissmer, Ann Flanagan, Jennifer Kawata, and Stephanie Williamson, *Improving Student Achievement: What State NAEP Test Scores Tell Us* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000).

The Role of Class Size Reduction in Improving Low-Performing Schools

Recent studies of the effects of class size reduction on student achievement paint a mixed picture of the impact this reform may have in low-performing schools. The Tennessee Student:Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) program, for example, found a strong positive impact. This study assigned primarily low-income and minority students to small classes from kindergarten to grade 3. It found that attending small classes had statistically significant positive effects on student achievement for every year a student participated in the smaller classes. Significant positive effects on student achievement continued through eighth grade, in every subject tested.[88] The short-term effects of small class sizes were greatest for black students and for those receiving free lunches.[89] Policymakers in Tennessee found the results of this study so compelling that they reduced class size in the early elementary grades to fourteen in seventeen school districts with exceptionally low average family incomes. Studies of these districts show even larger effects on student achievement than the initial study, which implies that the importance of class size reduction may grow along with the level of disadvantage of students in a community.[90]

The Wisconsin Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) also studied about 3,000 students from schools with very high proportions of free-lunch recipients who participated in a class size reduction program. The results of this study also showed statistically significant positive effects for smaller class sizes on student achievement in all subjects.[91] The reductions had particularly significant effects as measures of student poverty increased and with class reductions of three or more students per teacher.[92]

When does class size reduction *not* work? The results from California's statewide class size reduction program have been decidedly mixed. Although standardized test scores have improved slightly during the class size reduction program, researchers have not yet been able to conclude that the score increases were the result of class size reduction. Class size reduction in California also has not led to a decrease in students being referred and diagnosed with special needs, an outcome that was found in earlier studies.[93]

Why has class size reduction succeeded in Tennessee and Wisconsin but yielded mixed results in California? Part of the answer could be a matter of scale: Tennessee was a controlled study of about 10,000 students, Wisconsin was a controlled study of 3,000 students, and California has been implemented statewide with about 1.8 million children. The scale of the California program led to initial increases in the percentage of teachers working without full credentials in the state, an increase that was most pronounced in the state's highest-poverty schools. Also, although California reimbursed districts for many expenses related to class size reduction, districts found they still needed to reallocate resources to cover some costs, and in 1999-2000 almost 40 percent of districts reported decreasing professional development funds to compensate for the costs of class size reduction. Third, Tennessee's study reduced class size to thirteen to seventeen students, while California reduced classes to twenty. Finally, California has a much more diverse student body, had a severe teacher shortage going into its reduction efforts, and had a burgeoning student population that had outgrown existing facilities even before class sizes were reduced.[94]

What the California experience suggests is that class size reduction programs are no panacea. Given ideal circumstances as were available in Tennessee and Wisconsin, results can be impressive. But the adequate supply of high-quality teachers, the adequacy of school infrastructure to support more classes, and the actual size of class reductions can have important ramifications for the success of programmatic outcomes.

differently—with some courts ordering a statewide fix and others ruling that despite inequalities, it is up to the legislature to find solutions. Still, more and more states have been turning to a process of defining and insisting on an adequate education for all students. As a judge in a recent state school finance equity suit put it:

> The state ... must roll up its sleeves, step in, and, utilizing its constitutional authority and power over the [local education agencies], cause effective educational change when and where required.... It does not matter whether the lack of an equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education is caused by teachers, principals, lack of instructional materials or other resources, or a lack of leadership and effort.... The state must step in ... and get the mess straight.[95]

Under this view, to which the Study Group is sympathetic, ensuring *adequate* academic resources to students in low-performing schools is a fundamental state responsibility. Accomplishing this challenge may require states to provide financial support to low-performing schools in five ways simultaneously:

Help low-performing schools operate more efficiently with the fiscal resources they have. Many low-performing schools need help tracking and evaluating existing expenditures to eradicate or reform poorly functioning programs or those that do not contribute to student learning. Evaluation is critically important, even for programs that have a presumptive positive impact on student achievement. For example, class size reduction programs *can* positively impact student achievement, particularly among low-income students and students of color, but enacting a class size reduction program does not mean a school will necessarily achieve those outcomes. The box on page 50 describes studies of class size reduction and points out how designing programs differently may cause different outcomes to occur. What this means for low-performing schools is that it is not sufficient to simply reduce class sizes or implement any other school improvement strategy; programs need to be evaluated by a data-driven continuous improvement system that can measure program effectiveness and point out elements of programs that may need to be altered to achieve intended outcomes.

Devise funding formulas that take into account the real needs of low-performing schools. The second way in which states can help many low-performing schools is to allocate more money to them in ways that take into account the real needs of low-performing schools. The National Research Council's Committee on Education Finance, established by Congress to examine ways in which school finance systems can ensure efficiency and effectiveness in reaching high standards, found that most state aid programs do not provide schools in "harsh educational environments" (such as those with high rates of social problems and vandalism, high crime rates, low measures of student readiness for school, and low tax bases) with the fiscal resources they need to achieve the same standard as an average school. According to the committee, "A [state] foundation program that provides enough revenue for an average district to meet an adequate performance standard leaves a high-cost district short, often far short, of the revenue it needs."[96]

The committee encouraged states to develop "educational cost indexes" in place of foundation programs to measure how much a school district needs to spend, relative to the average district in the state, to meet a performance target. Such a cost index measures the resources needed to meet the goal under the circumstances faced by different districts and takes into account the fact that some districts may be able to meet the goal even if they are very financially inefficient, whereas other districts may have great challenges to meet a goal even if they are exceptionally efficient.

Measuring school needs in terms of educational cost indexes points out the extent to which low-performing schools may need more money to achieve the same outcomes as an average school under harsher educational conditions. Applying an educational cost index formula to school finances in New York, for example, the committee found that upstate suburbs must spend $.91 to achieve the same performance that the average New York district achieves spending $1.00. New York City, on the other hand, needs to spend almost four times as much as the average district to achieve the same standard.[97] These results, combined with similar results from calculations of educational cost indexes in Wisconsin and Michigan, demonstrate the large cost differences of providing an adequate education to students when the goal, or student achievement standard, is held steady.[98]

Use money as a catalyst for school improvement rather than as a carrot or a stick in an accountability system. As several states know, accountability systems that distribute financial rewards to schools based exclusively on performance measures can end up giving money to schools that need the least help in school improvement and denying those funds to schools working under the harshest conditions. Building a *state system of school improvement*, on the other hand, requires sufficient funds, along with support to help

spend those funds effectively, to flow to the schools operating under the harshest conditions. Distributing funds in this manner does not imply a decrease in accountability, and accountability needs to remain a central component of any system of school improvement. It does, however, re-focus the fundamental goal of the system and align fiscal policies toward the singular goal of accountability across the system for school *improvement*, rather than align policies toward accountability for school or district *outcomes* alone.

Develop uniform accounting measures to help researchers understand the exact relationship between school finance and school quality. Uniform accounting measures make it easier to undertake across-district comparisons of school expenditures and outcomes, and new technology makes the integration of uniform accounting measures across a state easier than ever. Still, few states require schools to adopt uniform accounting measures.[99] Florida is an exception, and has a school-level data-collection system that collects financial, student, and staff data online. Hawaii also has adopted software that can track classroom resources (teacher salaries, benefits, teaching materials, and computers) and compare expenditures on resources between average schools and schools serving at-risk students.[100]

Don't expect miracles overnight. Allocating fiscal resources to support comprehensive school improvement requires a long-term commitment to provide for the personnel, curricular, information, and financial needs of every school. If used fairly and wisely and in ways that are consistent with other efforts at school improvement, money can contribute significantly to the goal of improving student achievement and building high-quality schools for every community. School improvement does not always happen overnight, however, and schools that are implementing significant school improvement strategies need to know that financial support will be steady and adequate. The Committee on Education Finance made this point very clearly:

> [Switching to a finance system based on educational cost indexes] would not immediately bring high-cost districts up to the performance standard. Even if the resources needed to meet the standard were available to them, these districts would have to alter some existing practices, design new programs, and hire at least some new teachers, administrators, and counselors. These steps would take time. A reasonable approach, in our view, would be for a state to move to a performance-based aid system over a period of several years, providing along the way both management assistance and new research evidence about the effects of various educational programs. In combination with these extra steps, moving to a performance-based aid system would allow a state to say that it had provided each district with the resources it needs to meet the performance standard, as determined by the best available information and the current state of knowledge about educational costs.[101]

Some states have established finance systems to support school improvement. Maryland, for example, has become the first state in the nation to proactively approve *adequacy funding* of all schools in the state. In April 2002, the state approved a $2.2 billion state aid package over six years that distributes 74 percent of state aid inversely proportional to local wealth.[102] The box on page 53 describes the Maryland school finance system in detail.

Financing school improvement may not be easy, but the Study Group believes that most state finance systems have room to improve the kind and level of financial support they provide to low-performing schools. This support *may* take the form of significantly increased funds targeted to the needs of low-performing schools, but increased funding is not, in and of itself, the answer to low performance. Even when significantly more funds are not available, there are options available for states to target existing funds more effectively to support school improvement and to help schools use their resources to their best advantage. Ultimately, state education policymakers need to work with lawmakers to place the urgent needs of schools at the center of budgetary and programmatic decision-making and to build a system of school improvement that can realize the vision of high-quality schools for all students.

State of Maryland Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act of 2002

The Maryland General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 856 (Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act) on April 4, 2002. This act restructures Maryland's public school finance system and increases state aid to public schools by $2.2 billion over the next six fiscal years ($1.3 million more than required under the previous formula). The funding formula adopted by the General Assembly ensures equity and adequacy for Maryland's public school system by linking resources to the needs of students and distributing 74 percent of state aid inversely proportional to local wealth. The new finance structure is modeled after the recommendations of the Commission on Education Finance, Equity, and Excellence (the Thornton Commission). As a result, Maryland will embrace a standards-based approach to public school financing. Under this approach, the state must set academic performance standards, ensure that schools and students have sufficient resources to meet those standards, and hold schools and school systems accountable for student performance.

A foundation program was established to provide state and local aid to school systems based on general enrollment and a "base cost" per student. This base cost reflects the "cost of adequacy" as determined through the analyses conducted by the Thornton Commission. Overall, the state and counties each provide about 50 percent of the program costs. However, the program is wealth equalized: less wealthy counties, as measured by assessable tax base and taxable income, receive relatively more state aid per student than wealthier counties.

In addition to the adequacy-based foundation funding, three categorical programs were established for: (1) students with special education needs, (2) students with limited English proficiency, and (3) students from circumstances of economic disadvantage. School systems receive additional state aid for these "at-risk" students based on a formula linked to the foundation program and adjusted for local wealth. Each at-risk student is weighted in accordance with the "cost of adequacy" determined through the analyses conducted by the Thornton Commission. This weight is applied to the base cost per pupil used for the foundation program. Overall, the state pays 50 percent of the cost of adequacy for each at-risk student, but each county's distribution is adjusted based on local wealth.

A Guaranteed Tax Base Program was also established as an incentive to encourage low-wealth jurisdictions to maintain and increase their local education tax effort. The program distributes state aid to local jurisdictions with wealth-per-pupil below 80 percent of the state average if the jurisdiction provides funding for public education over and above the local share required under the foundation program.

Local school systems are provided maximum flexibility in spending resources; however, each local school system must develop a five-year comprehensive master plan providing for improvements in student achievement for every segment of the student population. Accountability is provided through the master plan process as well as assessments of student performance. If any segment of the student population fails to demonstrate progress toward meeting performance standards, the state superintendent must review the master plan and may require the school system to make changes to its plan. The state board of education has the authority to review and approve the allocation of resources in school systems that fail to improve student performance *and* that fail to develop a satisfactory master plan.

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APPENDIX I: Provisions from the No Child Left Behind Act Related to Low-Performing Schools

In 2002, Congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and included new and wide-sweeping requirements for states to designate schools as low performing and intervene to improve student performance. In general, states now have unprecedented opportunity to leverage federal support for state education reforms. The fundamental issue confronting each state, however, is how to coordinate existing state policies and programs concerning low-performing schools with the requirements of the new law and to do so in such a way that it avoids developing a patchwork of conflicting rules and regulations.

This summary focuses on the key assessment and accountability provisions of Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), particularly as they apply to low-performing schools.

State Academic Achievement Standards

The law requires that state standards apply equally to all students and include, at a minimum, mathematics and reading/language arts standards. By the 2005-06 school year, science standards must be included as well.

States need to establish at least three student achievement levels—advanced, proficient, and basic—that are aligned to the state's content standards. These achievement levels must be grade-specific, although content standards may be presented within grade spans.

State Assessments

States are required to implement annual statewide assessments in grades 3 to 8 and at least once during grades 10 to 12 in reading and mathematics beginning in 2005-06. Starting in 2007-08, science must be assessed at least once in grades 3 to 5, 6 to 9, and 10 to 12.

State assessments must:

- Be the same for all children;
- Produce individual student achievement reports;
- Be aligned to state standards, demonstrate quality, validity, and reliability, and measure higher-order thinking skills;
- Provide accommodations and alternative assessments for students with disabilities; and
- Assess limited English proficient students in their own language, to the maximum extent possible. Beginning in the 2002-03 school year, states must ensure that districts annual test all limited English proficient students in oral English, reading, and writing.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

State, district, and school performance will be measured according to each level's adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward the ultimate goal of having 100 percent of students proficient in reading and mathematics (according to state standards) by the end of the 2013-14 school year.

Student performance needs to be measured and reported not only for the student population in aggregate, but also for disaggregated groups of students according to six categories: race/ethnicity, sex, disability status, migrant status, economic status, and limited English proficiency.

States need to provide statewide, annual, measurable objectives for quantifying AYP. These include providing separate baselines for mathematics and reading/language arts and establishing a single minimum percentage of students needing to meet the proficiency standards. The annual objectives must be applied to all subgroups and ensure that all students meet or exceed the proficiency standards within the twelve-year timeline.

If any of the disaggregated groups do not meet the measurable objectives, then the state, district, or school will be considered to have failed to make AYP. There is a prescriptive series of sanctions states must undertake for any Title I school that fail AYP in two or more consecutive years (see "Accountability Consequences" below for a discussion of sanctions).

At least 95 percent of a school's students, and 95 percent of students within each subgroup, must take the state assessment or that school automatically fails to make AYP.

Specifically, AYP:

- Applies to all public school students in the state;
- Needs to be based primarily on assessment scores, but must also include graduation rates for secondary schools and one state-selected indicator for elementary schools; and
- Measures achievement in mathematics and language arts separately, so that improvement targets must be met in both subjects.

While states have some discretion in calculating AYP, they have to do so within the law's specific criteria and narrowly defined parameters:

AYP Baseline: A state's AYP starting point, or baseline, is calculated as the higher of either the percentage of students at or above the proficient level who attend the school at the 20th percentile in the state, or the percentage of students in the state's lowest-achieving subgroup who score at the proficient level or higher.

Intermediate Goals: States need to create intermediate goals for AYP. The bar must be raised in equal increments over the twelve-year timeline to 100 percent proficiency, with the first increase coming no later than the 2003-04 school year, and then at least every three years thereafter.

Uniform Averaging Procedures: States may average up to three years of test scores to calculate AYP, and may average scores across grades in a school, although this must be done separately for reading and math.

Safe Harbor Provision: If a disaggregated subgroup in a school decreases those scoring below proficient by at least 10 percent from the previous year, then that subgroup can be considered to have met AYP regardless of the initial yearly goal.

State and District Report Cards

States must publish annual state report cards beginning in the 2002-03 school year. These must include the following information:

- Aggregate student achievement on each state assessment, for each level of proficiency;
- Disaggregated achievement data for each assessment by the six required subgroups;
- Comparisons of subgroup achievement and measurable objectives for the subgroup for each required assessment;
- The percentage of students not tested, in the aggregate and disaggregated according to the six categories;
- The latest two-year trend data on each required assessment;
- Aggregate information on other public school indicators; and
- The professional qualifications of teachers in the state's public schools, including the percentage teaching with emergency or provisional credentials, and the percentage of classes not taught by highly qualified teachers (as defined within the federal legislation), reported both in aggregate and for the lowest and highest school poverty quartiles.

Similarly, local education agencies (LEAs) must publish annual district report cards within the same timeframe, and they must include all of the data listed above for the district as a whole and for each public school within it. The following additional elements are also required:

- The number and percentage of schools in a district that have been identified for improvement, the name of identified schools, and the duration of identification status for each; and

- Data concerning the performance of each school and of the district as a whole on each states assessment, compared to state averages.

Accountability Consequences

NCLB prescribes a set of escalating responses to Title I schools that continue to fail to meet AYP targets:

Two consecutive years of failure: Districts will designate the school for improvement and provide technical assistance. This assistance must include identifying scientifically based professional development practices and reallocating school budgets to address the causes of school identification. Unless prohibited by state law, districts must also offer public school choice to attend another school in the district to students in that school and pay for the associated transportation costs. If the designated funds do not cover the needs for all eligible students whose parents request school choice, the LEA must give priority to lowest-achieving students from low-income families.

Three consecutive years of failure: The LEA must designate a specified amount of Title I funds to make supplemental educational services available to all students in the school, as well as continue to provide technical assistance and public school choice options.

Supplemental educational services are tutoring and other supplemental academic services that are provided in addition to those provided during the regular school day. They must be high quality, research based, and designed to increase the academic achievement of eligible students on state assessments and to help students become proficient according to state achievement standards.

Providers of supplemental services may be non-profit entities, for-profit entities, or LEAs that have been effective in increasing student academic achievement. They must be capable of providing supplemental educational services consistent with the LEA curriculum and academic standards, and they must be financially sound.

States have specific responsibilities for supplemental services. State education agencies must:

- Create a screening process for approving prospective providers;
- Maintain a statewide list of approved providers, by district;
- Develop a method of evaluating and monitoring the effectiveness of providers; and
- Promote maximum participation of providers and parents interested in these services.

If state law prohibits the execution of any of the SEA responsibilities listed above, then that responsibility passes to the particular LEA.

Four consecutive years of failure: In addition to continuing public school choice, supplemental services, and technical assistance, LEAs must take at least one of the following actions:

- Reconstitute the school;
- Revamp the curriculum; or
- Extend the school year or the school day.

Five consecutive years of failure: School management and/or governance restructuring must occur. Public school choice, supplemental services, and technical assistance continue. LEAs also must take one of these steps by the start of the next school year:

- Convert the school to a public charter school;
- Replace school leadership and/or staff;
- Contract with an outside entity to operate the school; or
- Arrange for state takeover of the school.

District Identification for Improvement and Corrective Action

States are required to identify LEAs not making AYP for two consecutive years. As with individual schools, LEAs failing to make the AYP goals will be identified to receive technical assistance. States must institute corrective action for any LEA that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years.

When an LEA is identified for corrective action, the state must take at least one of the following steps:

- Defer programmatic funding or reduce administrative funds;
- Institute new standards-based curriculum that is accompanied by scientifically based professional development research;
- Replace LEA staff who contributed to failure to reach AYP goals;
- Remove some schools from LEA governance and establish alternative governance and supervision;
- Appoint a receiver or trustee to replace the superintendent and school board;
- Abolish or restructure the LEA; or
- Together with one other action on this list, permit public school choice across district lines and provide the necessary transportation support.

State Accountability

A state that fails to make AYP for two consecutive years will receive technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Education.

Quoted and adapted from NASBE, *The No Child Left Behind Act: What States Need to Know*, NASBE Policy Primer Series (Alexandria, VA: NASBE, 2002).

APPENDIX II: Case Studies

The Heritage Foundation's *No Excuses* Schools: Lessons from Twenty-One High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools

In 2000, the Heritage Foundation profiled 21 schools from across the country that have achieved high levels of student achievement under conditions of urban poverty. The Foundation believes that these schools demonstrate common-sense teaching and effective leadership strategies that can be emulated by other schools. It also asserts that the *No Excuses* schools have achieved their results in spite of the incentive structure and policy culture of public schools today, rather than because of it.

Analysis of the *No Excuses* schools reveals seven common traits of high-performing schools that are also high poverty:

- *Principals must be free* to decide how to spend money, what to teach, and who to hire to teach. Powerless principals can do little to spearhead change.
- *Principals use measurable goals to build a culture to support achieve-*

ment and to hold teachers personally responsible for bringing the principal's vision of quality alive in their classrooms.

- *Master teachers bring out the best in other teachers* and are powerful tools to improve instruction.
- *Rigorous and regular student testing fosters achievement* when it is used diagnostically for students and when it allows educators to evaluate the extent to which the prescribed curriculum is being implemented.
- *Achievement is the key to discipline* because it sets rigorous demands on students in terms of self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem that give them reason to avoid error and to seek success.
- *Principals work with parents to make home a center of learning*, often establishing contracts with parents about reading and homework in the evening hours.
- *Time on task is critical*, and so many schools use extended days, extended school years, after-school programs, weekend programs, and summer school for instruction—and no successful school wastes time.

The Heritage Foundation report points out several lessons for policymakers:

- Children of all races and income levels can learn to high standards;
- Leading in a high-poverty school is one of the most important positions in the nation;
- High achievement requires freedom to make decisions;
- Teacher certification and preparation programs need to be overhauled to relate to what we know about quality teaching; and
- Parents are eager to send their children to high-quality, high-performing schools.

From Samuel Casey Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2000).

The Education Trust's *Dispelling the Myth* Schools

The Education Trust has used a new federal database to find and to analyze the characteristics of "high-flying" schools that achieve high levels of student performance with high-poverty, high-minority populations. Based on its definitions of high performance (test scores in reading or math in the top third among all schools in the state at the same grade level), low income (at least 50 percent of students are low income and the school is ranked in the bottom third of schools in the state on socioeconomic indicators); and high minority (at least 50 percent of students are African American and Latino and the school is in the top third of schools in the state on indicators of diversity), Education Trust found that in 2001, there were:

- 3,592 high-performing, high-poverty schools;
- 2,305 high-performing, high-minority schools; and
- 1,320 high-performing, high-poverty, and high-minority schools.

Subsequent analysis of the same data set in 2002 found 2,770 high-poverty and/or high-minority schools that demonstrated high performance in at least one grade level and subject over more than one year. Even more impressive, 721 high-poverty and/or high-minority schools had high performance over more than one year, over more than one grade level, and in multiple subjects.

What characteristics do these schools share? Education Trust lists seven common characteristics of "high-flying" schools:

- Extensive use of local and state standards to design effective curricula and instruction,to evaluate student work, and to evaluate teachers;
- Increased instructional time that is targeted to reading and math;
- Investment in professional development for teachers that is focused on instructional practice to help students meet academic standards;
- Comprehensive systems to monitor the performance of individual students and to intervene to help struggling students before they fall far behind;
- Parent involvement in helping students meet standards;
- State or district accountability systems that hold adults in the school responsible—through the use of real consequences—for student achievement; and
- Use of formative assessments as a frequent part of teaching and learning to help guide instruction.

Education Trust uses these numbers of "high-flying" schools, and the characteristics they share, to argue forcefully that students in poverty and minority students can and should achieve high standards when schools are organized to help them do so. It suggests that these high numbers of schools should compel policymakers to stop using race and poverty as excuses for poor achievement, and instead encourage policymakers to study the successes of the *Dispelling the Myth* schools and use the lessons learned to improve achievement among greater numbers of minority students and students in poverty.

Adapted From: Education Trust, *Dispelling the Myth* (1999), *Dispelling the Myth: Revisited* (2001), and *Dispelling the Myth...Over Time* (2002), all published in Washington, DC by the Education Trust. Education Trust's data about the *Dispelling the Myth* schools is available on its website, in searchable format, at www.edtrust.org.

The Charles A. Dana Center's *Opening Doors* High Schools

The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin is a research center that provides Texas education leaders and policymakers with the knowledge, skills, and resources to inform school improvement in Texas and across the nation. In recent years, the Dana Center has undertaken several studies of schools that achieve high standards with high-poverty and high-minority student populations. One important research study of these schools is *Opening Doors*, a report that examines five high-poverty, high-minority, high-achieving high schools in large districts in Texas and describes key characteristics they share.

The researchers found that, while each school implemented practices in ways that were unique to its circumstances, the schools also shared several practices that were critical to their success:

Set high goals and establish high expectations. School leaders set and made public clear and measurable goals for students. These goals were based upon an assumption that all students can succeed—as long as they have appropriate support and high-quality instruction—and that all students should be prepared to attend college.

Use data to guide instructional decision-making. Student performance data was used to set goals for student achievement and to measure progress toward goals, to discern instructional strengths and weaknesses, to designate students in need of additional support, and to enhance collaboration around teaching and learning. Teachers received training and support in using data to make decisions about instruction.

Focus on instruction and on individual student learning. Staff focused on the strengths of individual students as well as specific areas where individual students required extra support. For students who experienced difficulties in class, staff individualized and intensified instruction.

Support teachers. School leaders worked with teachers to identify problems related to student achievement and to develop solutions. Leaders also prioritized the needs of classroom teachers when making budget or other critical kinds of decisions, provided teachers with ample time and resources to plan and carry out instruction, and took teachers' suggestions for school improvement seriously.

Foster an environment of respect and caring for students. School staff made themselves available to students, listened to student concerns, and involved students in important school decisions. Administrators and teachers also encouraged students to participate in extracurricular activities and attended these activities themselves.

The Charles A. Dana Center's report, *Opening Doors: Promising Practices from Five Texas High Schools*, is available from its website at http://www.utdanacenter.org.

The Milwaukee Effective Schools Study

The Milwaukee Public School district (MPS) undertook a study of schools in its district that achieved exceptionally high results with high-minority and high-poverty student populations. The Equity and High Standards Project examined characteristics of highly effective schools—the "90-90-90" schools—that have:

- at least 90 percent of students eligible for free and reduced lunch;
- at least 90 percent of students identifying as people of color; and
- at least 90 percent of students achieving high academic standards according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement.

Results from this study have affirmed for MPS the value of their data-driven system of school improvement. For example, the 90-90-90 study found that effective schools adopt the principle that all students can achieve at high levels. As a matter of fact, helping students who were most academically "at risk" was a hallmark of the effective schools studied. Schools implemented processes and strategies to identify students who needed extra help early on, accelerated their instruction, and monitored the progress of these students regularly.

Some of the other common characteristics shared by the 90-90-90 schools included:

- strategically focusing on only one or two areas of school improvement yearly;
- staying the course with a single long-range plan to guide the school;
- developing curriculum and teaching strategies at each grade level;
- constant analysis of school achievement data; and
- continual staff development.

APPENDIX III: Kentucky's Nine Standards and Indicators for School Improvement

Academic Performance

Standard 1: The school develops and implements an effective responsive curriculum that is rigorous, intentional, and aligned to state and local standards.

1.a curriculum is aligned with academic expectations, core content, programs of studies

1.b discussions occur among schools regarding curriculum standards

1.c discussions occur among schools to eliminate overlaps and close gaps

1.d vertical communications occur with a focus on key transition points

1.e curriculum links to continuing education, life and career options

1.f process to monitor, evaluate, and review curriculum is in place

1.g curriculum includes common academic core for all students

Standard 2: The school utilizes multiple evaluation and assessment strategies to continuously monitor and modify instruction to meet student needs and support proficient student work.

2.a classroom assessments are frequent, rigorous, and aligned

2.b teachers collaborate in design of assessment and in alignment

2.c students can articulate the expectations and know the requirements

2.d test scores used to identify gaps

2.e multiple assessments provide feedback on learning

2.f performance standards are communicated and observable

2.g Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) coordinated at building/district level

2.h student work is analyzed

Standard 3: The school's instructional program actively engages all students by using effective, varied, and research-based practices to improve student academic performance.

3.a varied instructional strategies used in all classrooms

3.b instructional strategies and activities aligned with goals

3.c strategies monitored and aligned to address learning styles

3.d teachers demonstrate content knowledge

3.e teachers incorporate technology into classrooms

3.f sufficient resources are available

3.g teacher collaboration occurs to review student work

3.h homework is frequent, monitored, and tied to instructional practice

Learning Environment

Standard 4: The school/district functions as an effective learning community and supports a climate conducive to performance excellence.

4.a leadership supports a safe, orderly environment

4.b leadership beliefs and practices support high achievement

4.c teacher beliefs and practices support high achievement

4.d teachers and non-teaching staff are involved in decision-making

4.e teachers accept their role in student success and failure

4.f effective assignment and use of staff strengths is apparent

4.g teachers communicate student progress with parents

4.h teachers care about students and inspire their best efforts

4.i multiple communication strategies are used to disseminate information

4.j student achievement is valued and publicly celebrated

4.k equity and diversity are valued and supported

Standard 5: The school/district works with families and community groups to remove barriers to learning in an effort to meet the intellectual, social, career, and developmental needs of students.

5.a families and communities are active partners

5.b all students have access to all of the curriculum

5.c school provides an organizational structure for collaboration with parents and community

5.d student instructional assistance is available outside of the classroom

5.e accurate student record keeping system is present and utilized

Standard 6: The school/district provides research-based, results-driven professional development opportunities for staff and implements performance evaluation procedures in order to improve teaching and learning.

6.a school has long-term professional growth plans

6.b school builds capacity with ongoing professional development

6.c staff development is aligned with student performance goals

6.d school improvement goals are connected to student learning goals

6.e professional development is ongoing and job-embedded

6.f professional development is aligned to an analysis of test data

6.g school has a clearly defined evaluation process for teachers

6.h leadership provides sufficient professional development resources

6.i evaluations and growth plans are used effectively

6.j evaluation process meets or exceeds statutory requirements

6.k instructional leadership needs are addressed

6.l leadership provides evaluation follow-up and support

Efficiency

Standard 7: School/district instructional decisions focus on support for teaching and learning, organizational direction, high performance expectations, creating a learning culture, and developing a leadership capacity.

7.a leadership has developed a shared vision in the school

7.b leadership decisions are collaborative and data-driven

7.c leadership personal professional development plan is focused on effective skills

7.d leadership disaggregates data

7.e leadership provides access to curriculum and data

7.f leadership maximizes time effectiveness

7.g leadership provides resources, monitors progress, and removes barriers to learning

7.h leadership ensures safe and effective learning

7.i leadership ensures necessary site-based decision-making

7.j site-based decision-making has intentional focus on student academic performance

7.k leader has skills in academic performance, learning environment, and efficiency

Standard 8: The organization of the school/district maximizes use of all available space and other resources to maximize teaching and learning and support high student and staff performances.

8.a organization of the school maximizes organization and resources for achievement

8.b master schedule provides all student access

8.c staffing based on student needs

8.d staff efficiently uses time to maximize learning

8.e team vertical and horizontal planning focused on improvement plan

8.f schedule is aligned with student learning needs

8.g resources are used and distributed equitably

8.h discretional funds are allocated according to data-based needs

8.i funds are aligned with comprehensive planning goals

8.j state and federal funds are allocated according to comprehensive planning goals and data needs

Standard 9: The school/district develops and evaluates a comprehensive school improvement plan that communicates a clear purpose, direction, and action plan focused on teaching and learning.

9.a school vision, mission, and beliefs are defined with a collaborative process

9.b the planning process involves collecting, managing, and analyzing data

9.c school uses data for school improvement planning

9.d plans reflect research and expectations for learning and are reviewed by a team

9.e staff analyze student learning needs

9.f desired learning results are defined

9.g data are used to determine instructional and organizational strengths and limitations

9.h school goals are defined

9.i school improvement action steps are aligned with goals and objectives

9.j improvement plan identifies resources, timelines, and person responsible

9.k process is in place to effectively evaluate the improvement plan

9.l improvement plan is aligned with mission, beliefs, school profile, and desired results

9.m improvement plan is implemented as it was developed to be implemented

9.n school evaluates the degree of student learning set by the improvement plan

9.o school evaluates student performance according to the improvement plan

9.p school gathers evidence to sustain the commitment to continuous improvement

These standards and indicators are available online at http://www.kde.state.ky.us/olsi/improve/schaudit/nine_standards.asp.

Appendix IV: Selected Diagnostic Indicators for School Improvement

This list—while by no means complete or appropriate for every school improvement program—is intended to provide examples of the wide range of data that may be useful to particular school improvement efforts. It points out the fact that no single measure can paint a complete picture to describe why schools succeed or fail. State policymakers need to consider the specific indicators that would provide useful information in the context of their specific policy systems.

Indicators of Leadership Quality

School Indicators

- Amount of time leader spends in classrooms

- Extent to which school has adopted shared vision and goals
- Degree to which school adheres to legal and policy requirements
- Extent to which leader has knowledge and understanding of community characteristics and needs
- Measures of parent and community involvement in school
- Extent to which the leader has built a schedule that facilitates collaboration among teachers
- Extent to which leader encourages the use of assessment for continuous improvement and to monitor student progress
- Number of student discipline referrals, suspensions, and expulsions
- Degree to which leader recognizes student and teacher achievement
- Extent to which a leader makes data-driven decisions for continuous improvement

District Indicators

- Amount of funds and other resources dedicated to improving school leadership
- Extent of recruitment efforts for high-quality school leaders
- Average years of experience among school leaders
- Extent to which teachers in the district are supported if they pursue preparation for leadership positions
- Difference in salary between experienced teachers and school principals

State Indicators

- Evaluations of principal preparation programs in terms of their alignment with principal standards
- Scores on principal licensure exams, and the geographic distribution of those who score well
- Level of participation in leadership academies and principal professional development opportunities
- Ease with which highly qualified, non-traditional candidates (such as those from business, military, or private school backgrounds) can enter leadership positions in public schools
- Amount of funds committed to the development of high-quality school leaders

Indicators of Teacher Quality

School Indicators

- Percentage of teachers with full licensure
- Percentage of teachers with bachelors degree in content area
- Percentage of teachers teaching out of field of licensure
- Percentage of teachers with five or fewer years of experience
- Percentage of annual teacher turnover
- Number of suspensions and other kinds of discipline referrals
- Measure of average teacher absenteeism
- Number of home visits and/or phone calls to parents about student work
- Measure of quality of new teacher mentoring or induction program available at school
- Evaluation of collegiality among teachers
- Level of satisfaction in teaching assignment among staff
- Measure of respect and order apparent in classrooms

District Indicators

- Same indicators as at school level, with results charted across schools
- Teacher performance on licensure exams and distribution across schools
- Evidence of reasons why teachers leave
- Extent to which union contracts encourage experienced teachers to accept positions with the greatest challenges
- Measure of quality of teacher mentoring program
- Measure of quality and scope of new teacher recruitment program
- Percentage of new teachers who attend preparation programs that are deemed to be of high quality
- Measure of quality and scope of incentives for high-quality teachers to work in low-performing schools
- Percentage of resources allocated to attract and retain teachers in schools in need of improvement

State Indicators

- Same indicators as at school and district levels, with results charted across schools and districts
- Supply/demand calculations that are sufficiently sophisticated to take account of program graduates who do not enter teaching, teachers re-entering the field, and subject area supply/demand figures
- Measure of quality and scope of statewide incentives for high-quality teachers to work in low-performing schools
- Extent to which teacher licensure criteria avoid unnecessary barriers to enter the field
- Extent to which teacher standards have been established that are aligned with student standards
- Extent and quality of new teacher induction program
- Number and location of high-quality alternative preparation programs
- Length of required preservice clinical experience
- Extent to which teacher standards are aligned with high-quality teaching and with licensure requirements
- Teacher assessment data disaggregated by teacher and student characteristics
- District opinions about the extent to which state policies and programs help prepare, attract, and retain high-quality teachers

Indicators of the Quality and Distribution of Professional Development

School Indicators

- Degree to which professional development is related to curriculum, standards, and specific learning needs of students
- Extent to which professional development is evaluated according to its impact on student learning
- Degree to which professional development includes ample time for high-quality training, practice, feedback, reflection, and follow-up
- Extent to which professional development takes account of specific school contexts
- Number of hours each week or month that teachers share planning time
- Extent to which the elements of the professional development program are included in teachers' practice

- Extent to which teachers impact the content of their professional development
- Teacher opinions on the quality of their professional development experiences

District Indicators

- Degree to which district-sponsored professional development is related to curriculum and standards, and specific learning needs of students
- Extent to which professional development is evaluated according to its impact on student learning
- Extent of assistance available to help schools select appropriate professional development experiences
- Extent to which professional development takes account of specific school contexts
- Degree to which district supports school-to-school visitation programs to share promising practices
- Degree to which quality and amount of professional development available to teachers is a part of school evaluation criteria
- Amount of funds set-aside for professional development as well as for release time for teachers and for independent professional growth opportunities for teachers

State Indicators

- Outcomes of particular programs in terms of improvements in student achievement
- Amount of state funds allocated for professional development
- Degree to which the state education department offers its own professional development to schools in need of improvement
- Number of hours each week or month that schools are required to schedule shared planning time for teachers
- School accreditation requirements include provisions for elements of high-quality professional development—such as shared planning time for teachers and teacher involvement in curricular decision-making
- Number of professional development providers available at a reasonable cost to isolated, rural schools
- Districts' opinions about the extent to which state policies and programs help, rather than hinder, the provision of high-quality professional development

Indicators of Curricular Quality

School Indicators

- Evaluation of student interest in included learning activities
- Degree of student activity/passivity in suggested learning strategies
- Degree to which higher-order thinking is stressed in the curriculum
- Measure of alignment between curriculum and student assessments
- Percentage of staff who feel engaged in the construction of specific outcomes related to curriculum
- Alignment between curriculum and the school's educational goals and plan
- Degree to which curriculum includes high-quality formative assessment
- Extent to which curriculum focuses on literacy and writing
- Extent to which curriculum provides a wide range of instructional techniques and learning activities for students who fall behind
- Extent to which the curriculum provides the resources teachers need to accelerate and intensify instruction for students who fall behind
- Degree to which adequate instructional time is scheduled for the delivery of the curriculum
- Extent to which the instructional time is uninterrupted (e.g., by intercom announcements, student assemblies, field trips, or teacher-initiated instructional interruptions)

District Indicators

- Extent to which the schools are implementing the curriculum as intended
- Amount and quality of training and professional development offered by district about the particular curriculum
- Degree to which higher-order thinking is stressed in the curriculum
- Degree to which curriculum adopted by district includes high-quality formative assessment
- Extent to which curriculum adopted by district builds systematically across the years of schooling
- Extent to which curriculum adopted by district focuses on literacy and writing
- Extent to which curriculum adopted by district provides a wide range of instructional techniques and learning activities for students who fall behind
- Extent to which the curriculum adopted by district provides the resources teachers need to accelerate and intensify instruction for students who fall behind
- Measure of alignment between curriculum and state and local student assessments
- Extent to which staff participated in decisions concerning the adoption and implementation of the curriculum

State Indicators

- High-quality assessment system that is aligned to state standards directs curricular adoption at the local level
- As a state is able, curricular guides suggest curriculum that is aligned with assessments and standards
- Technical assistance is available to schools and districts that fail to adopt appropriate curriculum
- As a state is able, student achievement results from standardized tests are analyzed in terms of their relation to the curriculum used by schools
- In states that adopt textbooks, texts offer a wide range of high-quality curricular materials for schools and districts to choose from that are aligned with state standards and assessments
- States ensure that appropriate curricular evaluation is undertaken at school and district levels
- States provide guidance to schools and districts on maximizing academic learning time
- Amount of funds committed to the development of high-quality standards, assessments, curricular guidelines, etc.
- Districts' opinions about the extent to which state policies and programs help, rather than hinder, the adoption and implementation of high-quality school curriculum

Indicators of Use of Data

School Indicators

- Extent to which staff use four kinds of data to inform instructional decisions
- Extent to which staff use four kinds of data to inform school improvement efforts

- Extent to which school improvement plan includes goals and strategies based upon data
- Extent to which school disaggregates data to point to key areas for school improvement
- Degree to which school uses data to prioritize needs and actions
- Degree to which school community views improvement as a continuous process
- Extent to which students are invited to examine the results of their formative assessments

District Indicators

- Extent to which district staff use four kinds of data to inform school improvement efforts
- Extent to which district ensures that school improvement plans include goals and strategies based upon data
- Extent to which district disaggregates data to point to key areas for school improvement
- Degree to which district uses data to prioritize needs and actions among schools in need of improvement
- Degree to which district views improvement as a continuous process
- Extent to which data-driven continuous improvement is a part of school evaluation criteria
- Amount of technical assistance provided to schools that do not make effective use of data in decision-making

State Indicators

- Extent to which state policies support the use of four kinds of data to inform school improvement efforts
- Extent to which state has adopted a system of data-driven continuous improvement for its own improvement efforts
- Level and quality of technical assistance provided to districts and schools to help them establish data-driven systems of continuous improvement
- Amount of technical assistance provided to schools and/or districts that do not make effective use of data in decision-making
- Extent to which state provides fiscal resources to support data collection and analysis at the local level

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